

In Another World With My Smartphone

Patora Fuyuhara
illustration • Eiji Usatsuka

15



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INTERLUDE: THE BRUNHILD GUARDIANS

THIS COUNTRY WAS MADE FROM THE GROUND-UP BY MY MASTER... IT'S NO EXAGGERATION TO SAY THAT I, STANDING AT HIS SIDE, AM ONE OF THE GUARDIAN BEASTS OF BRUNHILD ITSELF. IT IS OUR DUTY TO KEEP PEACE IN THIS NATION.





**HAVE
SOME
FUN IN
THE
SUN!**

**WHY NOT
TAKE A LITTLE
BREAK FROM
YOUR TROUBLES?**



**"Hey,
idiot.
Let go
of my
friend's
hand."**

**"I am the
Crown Prince
of the
Panaches
Kingdom!
Robert Tell
Panaches!
But please,
we are
friends now,
so just call
me Robert!"**

Character Profiles



Elze Silhoueska

One of Touya's fiancées. The elder of the twin sisters saved by Touya some time ago. A ferocious melee fighter, she makes use of gauntlets in combat. Her personality is fairly to-the-point and blunt. She can make use of Null fortification magic, specifically the spell **[Boost]**. She loves spicy foods.



Yumina
Urnea Belfast

One of Touya's fiancées. Princess of the Belfast Kingdom. She was twelve years old in her initial appearance, and her eyes are heterochromatic. The right is blue, while the left is green. She has mystic eyes that can discern the true character of an individual. She has three magical aptitudes: Earth, Wind, and Darkness. She's also extremely proficient with a bow and arrow. She fell in love with Touya at first sight.



Mochizuki Touya

A highschooler who was accidentally murdered by God. He's a no-hassle kind of guy who likes to go with the flow. He's not very good at reading the atmosphere, and typically makes rash decisions that bite him in the ass. His mana pool is limitless, he can flawlessly make use of every magical element, and he can cast any Null spell that he wants. He's currently the Grand Duke of Brunhild.



Sushie
Urnea Ortlinde

One of Touya's fiancées. She was ten years old in her initial appearance. Her nickname is Sue. The niece of Belfast's king, and Yumina's cousin. Touya saved her from being attacked on the road. She has an innocently adventurous spirit.



Lucia Leah
Regulus

One of Touya's fiancées. The Third Princess of the Regulus Empire, she's Yumina's age. She fell in love with Touya when he saved her during a coup. She likes to fight with twin blades, and she's on good terms with Yumina.



Kokonoe Yae

One of Touya's fiancées. A samurai girl from the far eastern land of Eashen, a country much like Japan. She tends to repeat herself and speak formally, she does. Yae is quite a glutton, eating more than most normal people would dare touch. She's a hard worker, but can sometimes slack off. Her family runs a dojo back in Eashen, and they take great pride in their craft. It's not obvious at first, but her boobs are pretty big.



Linze Silhoueska

One of Touya's fiancées. The younger of the twin sisters saved by Touya some time ago. She wields magic, specifically from the schools of Light, Water, and Fire. She finds talking to people difficult due to her own shy nature, but she is known to be surprisingly bold at times. Rumors say she might be the kind of girl who enjoys male on male romance... She loves sweet foods.



Paula

A stuffed toy bear animated by years upon years of the **[Program]** spell. She's the result of two-hundred years of programmed commands, making her seem like a fully aware living being. Paula... Paula's the worst!



Sakura

A mysterious girl Touya rescued in Eashen. She had lost her memories, but has now finally gotten them back. Her true identity is Farnese Forneus, daughter of the Xenoaahs Overlord. Currently living a peaceful life in Brunhild, and she has joined the ranks of Touya's fiancées.



Leen

One of Touya's fiancées. Former Clan Matriarch of the Fairies, she now serves as Brunhild's Court Magician. She claims to be six-hundred-and-twelve years old, but looks tremendously young. She can wield every magical element except Darkness, meaning her magical proficiency is that of a genius. Leen is a bit of a light-hearted bully.



Hildegard
Minas Lestia

One of Touya's fiancées. First Princess of the Knight Kingdom Lestia. Her swordplay talents earned her a reputation as a 'Knight Princess'. Touya saved her life when she was attacked by a group of Phrases, and she's loved him ever since. She's a good friend of Yae, and she stammers a bit when flustered.



Luli

The fourth of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She is the Azure Monarch, the ruler of dragons. She often clashes with Kohaku due to her condescending personality.



Kougyoku

The third of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She is the Flame Monarch, ruler of feathered things. Though her appearance is flashy and extravagant, she's actually quite cool and collected.



Sango and Kokuyou

The second of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. They are the Black Monarch, two in one. The rulers of scaled beasts. They can freely manipulate water. Sango is a tortoise, and Kokuyou is a snake. Sango is a female, and Kokuyou is a male (but he's very much a female at heart).



Kohaku

The first of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She's the White Monarch, the ruler of beasts, the guardian of the west and a beautiful White Tiger. She can create devastating shockwaves, and also change size at will.



High Rosetta

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Workshop, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Rosetta for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #27. For whatever reason, she's the most reliable of the bunch.



Francesca

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Hanging Garden, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Cesca for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #23. She likes to tell very inappropriate jokes.



Mochizuki Moroha

The God of Swords. Claims to be Touya's older sister. She trains the and advises the knights of Brunhild. She's gallant and brave, but also a bit of an airhead at times.



Mochizuki Karen

The God of Love. Claims to be Touya's older sister. She stays in Brunhild because she says she needs to catch a servile god, but doesn't really do all that much in the way of hunting him. She's a total pain in the butt.



Pamela Noël

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Tower, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Noel for short and wears a jersey. Her Airframe Serial Number is #25. She sleeps all the time, and eats laying down. Her tremendous laziness means she doesn't do all that much.



Preliora

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Rampart, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Liora for short and wears a blazer. Her Airframe Serial Number is #20. She's the oldest of the Babylon Gynoids, and would attend to the... Personal night-time needs of Doctor Babylon herself. She has no experience with men.



Fredmonica

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Hangar, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Monica for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #28. She's a funny little hard worker who has a bit of a casual streak. She's a good friend of Rosetta, and is the Gynoid with the most knowledge of the Frame Gears.



Bell Flora

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Alchemy Lab, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Flora for short and wears a nurse outfit. Her Airframe Serial Number is #21. A nurse with dangerously big boobs and even more dangerous medicines.



Doctor Regina Babylon

An ancient genius from a lost civilization, reborn into an artificial body that resembles a small girl. She is the "Babylon" that created the many artifacts and forgotten technologies scattered around the world today. Her Airframe serial number is #29. She remained in stasis for five-thousand years before finally being awakened.



Atlantica

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Research Lab, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Tica for short. Her Airframe serial number is #22. Of the Babylon Numbers, she is the one who best embodies Doctor Babylon's inappropriately perverse side.



Lileleparshe

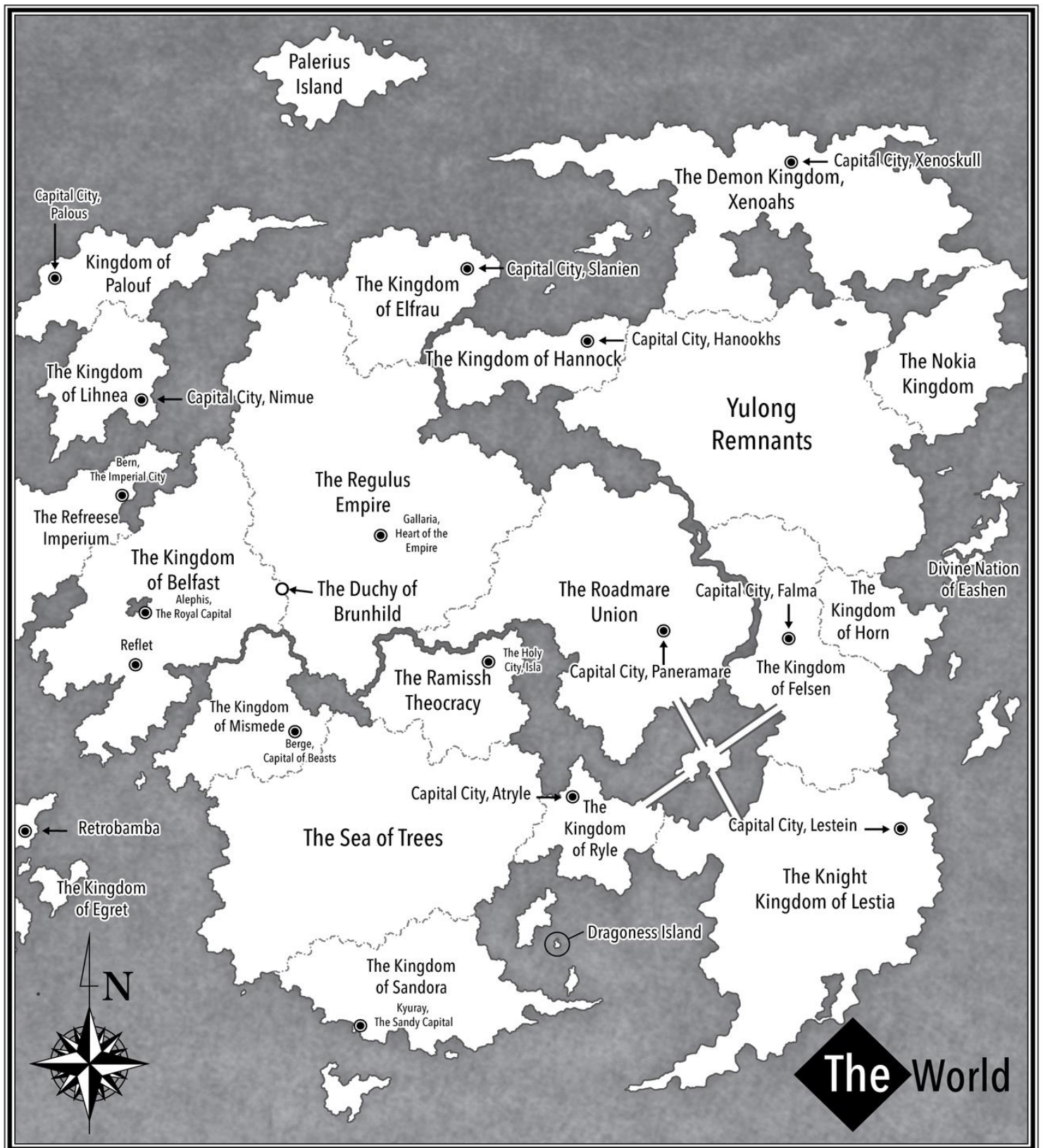
Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Storehouse, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Parshe for short and wears a shrine maiden outfit. Her Airframe Serial Number is #26. She's tremendously clumsy, even if she's just trying to help. The amount of stuff she ruins is troublingly high.



Irisfam

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Library, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Fam for short and wears a school uniform. Her Airframe Serial Number is #24. She's a total book fanatic and hates being interrupted when she's reading.

The Worlds of In Another World With My Smartphone World Map





The Story So Far!

Mochizuki Touya, wielding a smartphone customized by God himself, continues to live his life in a new world. After many adventures, Touya, now Grand Duke of a small nation named Brunhild, has joined forces with the other world leaders. Why? To stop the incoming extradimensional threat known as the Phrase. These merciless invaders from another world will stop at nothing until they get what they desire. As Touya continued to investigate potential ways to repel this threat, he found himself falling into another world entirely. This Reverse World was like a mirrored version of the world he knew, and relied on a mysterious mechanical technology known as the Gollems. Now, the fate of two worlds may hang in the balance...

Interlude I: The Guardians of Brunhild

I am a tiger. My name is Kohaku. That name means “noble protector.” It didn’t always mean that, but it means that now. That’s what I decided it means. I’m not just any tiger, either. I have command over mammals and earth-dwelling beasts. For I am the White Monarch, a Heavenly Beast.

My master is Mochizuki Touya, grand duke of the Duchy of Brunhild. He’s quite an incredible man.

This country was made from the ground-up by him... It’s no exaggeration to say that I am one of the guardian beasts of Brunhild itself.

There are four others like me, as well. Together, it is our duty to keep peace in this nation. Even today, I have just knocked out two attempted food thieves.

“Amazing work, Kohaku... You really helped us out. We’ll handle it from here.”

“Of course. Do your best.”

I was speaking with a knight of Brunhild as he arrested the perpetrators. He and his cohorts served my master as well, so in a sense, I could consider them kin. Though... their connection wasn’t quite as deep. I was directly bound to him, after all.

The residents of the town were often fearful of my true form, so, for the time being, I maintained the adorable form of a tiger cub. If anything, it was useful. The women and children of the town felt safe, and any criminals knew that if they caused trouble, they might end up facing the wrath of my hidden might.

There were a few people staring at my exchange with the guards, they must have been foreigners. Everyone in town had already gotten used to the fact that I could talk. Before he ascended to royalty, my liege asked that I not speak very often. But according to him, it was fine to talk now.

“Oh, it’s Lanz and Kohaku! Are you working hard?”

“Hm? Ah, hello there, Micah.”

“A-Ah, h-hello there! Y-Yes, we’re just clearing up a crime scene! Kohaku here took down a pair of dine-and-dashers!”

Standing before myself and the stammering knight was a young woman clad in an apron. Her red hair looked rather pleasant. Her name was Micah, she managed the Silver Moon Inn. She was someone my lord had met quite early on in his journey. I was also respectful toward her due to her kindness toward him. She was also quite the cook. I always knew that when I visited the Silver Moon, there was a good chance I’d eat well.

“Oh my, you’re working hard... Please come to see me later on, okay? I’ll cook you my finest meal.”

“Th-Thank you! I-I’ll be sure to, of course!”

I didn’t understand what was wrong with the young guard next to me. His breathing had grown uneven, and his face was getting redder. I wondered if he was perhaps afraid of me, but that couldn’t be it... He’d been talking to me normally not long ago. I was a bit confused.

“A-Alright, I’ll be on my way then! Time to take the perpetrators t-to the prison, and such!” The young man and his fellow guards walked off with the criminals. Thieves were nothing but a blight on Brunhild, if you asked me. Personally, I’d have been happy ripping them to shreds, but my lord wouldn’t want it that way. That was why I followed as I was ordered.

“Oh! It’s Kohakuuu!”

“Really? Where is she?”

“Ack... This isn’t good... It’s the children... Micah, I’ll be on my way. You take care.”

“Not easy being popular, eh? Eheh... See you soon, Kohaku.”

I said my goodbyes to Micah and dashed into a nearby back alley.

As soon as I turned the corner, I jumped from wall to wall and clambered up to the roof. I looked down and saw the children looking here and there. They’d lost me.

They were good kids, but I didn’t have time for them. I was very busy, after all.

I waited a while, and they finally gave up their frantic search. I quietly asked for their forgiveness.

Mm... The weather is quite nice today... And the breeze is good up here. Maybe I should take a little catnap...

“Kohaku.”

“Gwah?!”

Suddenly hearing my name was so surprising that I almost fell off the roof. Fortunately, I managed to hold on and stop just at the last second. That was seriously dangerous... I looked up to the source of the voice, and my eyes met with a flaming bird staring down at me.

“Kougyoku! Don’t startle me like that!”

“Don’t be so rude. I saw you... Fleeing from children so you could take a little nap, hm?” *Crap... She saw that?*

Kougyoku... She was another Heavenly Beast. Much like me, she was summoned by Mochizuki Touya, so we shared him as our lord and master.

She was the Flame Monarch that ruled over airborne creatures. The birds were useful to our lord due to their recon abilities.

It was regretful to admit, but she and her kin were far more useful in that regard than me and my own. I could summon mice to investigate houses more closely, but her birds-eye view would always have the upper hand. Not to mention the fact that birds could easily travel across borders unnoticed.

Kougyoku's dependents could easily look for issues in the town, but their eyes and ears expanded across the entire nation.

The birds kept an eye on the surrounding countryside and mountains. We didn't exactly want highwaymen or bandits holing up anywhere near our territory, after all.

"And what if I was? Did you drop by just to comment?"

"No, not exactly. I just saw something that made me anxious. A carriage came rolling through town a bit earlier. The man who came out claimed to be a traveling merchant, but he looks... Extremely uncouth. The men he claims to be his escort also look troublesome, as well. I don't know if I should judge them solely on their appearance, but it still seemed odd."

"Hmm... Maybe they're thugs in disguise?"

"It is a possibility, or I could just be judging without reason."

There had been an incident in the past where some criminals had disguised themselves and made their way to Olba Strand's store. They attempted to rob it.

The products in this town weren't found very often in other parts of the world, so it wasn't unusual to have different merchants come through.

The interesting items were all invented by our master, and there were also other valuables like weapons and armors crafted from materials found on the Dungeon Island we had access to.

Apparently, the crooks had heard about these goods and came in late at night to steal them away.

We'd been made aware of this immediately, and we had the knights charge straight in and take the men into custody. Fortunately, no harm actually came to Mr. Strand's storefront.

It was unfortunate, but this kind of thing was happening more often as of late.

Our lord was very young for a world leader, and he'd had his start as an adventurer. A lot of criminals around the world wrongfully assumed that he was a foolish and incredibly lucky child who had gotten this territory by chance. By extension, they believed that would make his country an easy target for plunder.

For the most part, they came and were promptly dealt with, all for the sake of a few trinkets.

Our dear master was certainly troubled by the influx of these fools.

"Alright, then... We should keep an eye on these guys."

"I'll be counting on you, then. Farewell," Kougyoku said as she flapped her wings and took off. I'd be fine to follow up on these strangers... Right after my nap.

That was what I wanted, at least... But I knew I had work to do. I leaped from the rooftop and headed toward the school. Usually, I'd have avoided that place, but today there were no classes, so I knew I wouldn't be assaulted by the hordes of little kids.

When I arrived on the school grounds, I saw Fiana pegging up some laundry. *Hmm... I don't see the little creature anywhere...*

Fiana was the mother of Sakura, and Sakura was one of my lord's betrothed. That meant her status exceeded mine. I was careful not to be rude, as a result.

"Oh my, Kohaku. Good day to you. Can I help you?"

"Good day, Miss Fiana. I am sorry for the sudden intrusion, but could you tell me where I might find Mr. Mittens?"

Mr. Mittens was an obnoxious little creature that Sakura had summoned, and he spent his days helping out Fiana. That meant he could typically be found by her side. Because Mr. Mittens wasn't one of my lord's direct summons, I couldn't telepathically communicate with him. That was most inconvenient.

"D'Artagnan? He's over there." I looked over to where Fiana pointed and saw him curled up and napping on a two-person swing that had clearly been constructed for the children.

"Zzz... Meow..."

Why you little... Sleeping on the job, eh? That's no fair... When I wanted to take a catnap I was woken by Kougyoku... As I grumbled quietly, Mr. Mittens opened up his eyes and slowly looked around. He might've sensed my frustration.

"...Meow...? Wh-What?! L-L-Lady Kohaku?!" Mr. Mittens found his hair standing on end. In a matter of seconds, he swung back and forth and propelled himself into the air, landing perfectly on the ground.

"...You have plenty of free time, I see."

"N-Nonono! Y-You're just mistaken, I promise! There's no claws for concern! It was just a slow day, and I happened to be taking a brief break! That's all there is to it!" Mr. Mittens began to frantically spew excuses. To be honest, that just made him look way more suspicious, but there was no point in calling him out. I decided to leave it be.

I relayed to him what Kougyoku had told me, and told him to look into it.

“Very well! Athos is on his way here, so I’ll go out and look into it after he agrees to escort Lady Fiana in my stead. I’ll lend you my aid as soon as I am able.”

“Mm. Fine, then.”

I said goodbye to Fiana and continued on my way. Even though he was Sakura’s summon, I did like that Mr. Mittens worked closely with me.

Now... I have time for a little nap while he gathers information.

“Ooh, it’sss Kohaku. Hello there, darling~!”

“Good day, Kohaku.”

“Tsk...”

“No need to tsssk at usss!”

Sadly, my nap was over again. Another annoyance, or rather... a pair of annoyances, had gotten in my way.

It was a turtle and a black snake, swimming through the air toward me. Collectively they were the Black Monarch, and they were other Heavenly Beasts that my master had summoned. Sango and Kokuyou.

“What do you want?”

“How very rude... We found sssomething interessting, sso we thought it appropriate to report.”

“Hrmph...”

Kokuyou’s words annoyed me a little. This guy wasn’t exactly as gentle and womanly as Kokuyou was, so I sometimes felt a little tense around him.

“Our kin found this object along the side of the road.”

Sango dropped something near me. *Hm...?*

It just looked like a tree branch. But then I noticed the scent wafting from it.

“...Beastwood.”

“Exactly. A wicked piece of material that can drive magical beasts insane.” Beastwood was formed when trees or other plants sprouted from the corpses of dead magical beasts.

The scent of the wood would waft out and cause wild creatures that smelled it to fall into a trance, they’d approach the tree and be consumed by it. It even sucked the nutrients out of people.

Branches from these trees could be treated in a chemical solution to preserve them.

Then they could be burned like incense, and they’d give off a unique aroma. Unfortunately, this aroma would cause any nearby monsters with a large amount of magic in their bodies to go berserk.

Anything under its influence would become insanely violent. They’d lose all sense of pain and fight until they died.

It was a very dangerous piece of equipment to use and was often employed by experienced monster hunters. They’d burn a piece and toss it into the lairs of powerful creatures, causing them to fight each other until they died.

But it was still risky. If used in a crowded area it could cause creatures to charge and rampage together in a group.

In the worst case scenario, it could trigger a stampede... It was the kind of thing that could be used to level an entire town.

“Do you think this is suspicious?”

"I certainly think it'sss rare for goodsss sssuch asss thisss to appear on the highway."

"Beastwood causes hysteria in whoever it affects, so it could've just been dropped by an airborne creature..."

It just looked like deadwood at a glance. Most people would have just walked on past it. It was highly likely that it had just made its way near Brunhild by chance over time.

However, one did have to take into account the possibility that someone was aiming to damage Brunhild by actively employing it.

"I don't think we need to worry. Our lord made a protective barrier that keeps monsters out of the town anyway."

"Ssstill... We can't dissscount the fact that thisss may be an act of terrorisssm."

Kokuyou sounded angry. I was angry as well, to be truthful. Even if it was in vain, it was possible someone had tried to harm our lord's nation. It was also irritating that the perpetrator must have assumed our lord was careless enough not to erect countermeasures for attacks like that. Though, to be fair, even if there were no barrier I was confident that I and the other Monarchs could have taken care of runaway monsters.

I asked Sango and Kokuyou to check on the integrity of the barrier, just in case. One couldn't afford to neglect these things, after all.

"Should we inform our master of this?"

"I'm not so sure just yet. I think we should just check for ourselves right now. If we bothered to include him in something like this, it'd just be the same as admitting our own ineptitude."

Plus, I had a feeling this could be connected to the strange merchants Kokuyou mentioned. I decided to wait on Mr. Mittens and see if he had anything to report later on.

If I found out they were planning something strange, I'd simply annihilate them.

I couldn't forgive anyone who would seek to harm Brunhild. They'd have a firm reminder of just who it was they were messing with!



After parting ways with Kokuyou and Sango, I made my way back to the castle. I was getting a bit hungry, after all. I poked my head into the kitchen to see if there was anything for me to nibble on.

"Yellowfish simmered and prepared successfully!"

"Good work! Get around to setting the plate!"

The kitchen was filled with cooks, it was as fearsome as a battlefield in there. I saw Crea, the head cook, and Lu, scrambling around the kitchen like true professionals. Lu seemed like she was struggling to keep up.

It was busier than usual today, for some reason. I quickly realized it was because the other world leaders had gathered together in the castle.

I wasn't allowed to walk into the kitchen itself, so I could only peek inside. Nobody wanted fur in their food, so it was understandable.

"Oh, Kohaku? Are you here for lunch? Please wait a moment."

"Of course."

As I stood by the kitchen entrance, Renne, a young maid in training, spoke to me.

After a short while, Renne came out with my meal on a tray. She was carrying it with both hands. On one side of the tray was omelet rice and sashimi, prepared by Lu. On the other side were several slices of meat and cheese.

“Are you eating on the balcony?”

“Yes. I appreciate your help.”

Renne walked along with me and took my meal out on to the balcony outside the dining room. When the weather was nice, I liked to eat in the courtyard, or on the balcony. Today I happened to feel like eating on the balcony, though. I thought it was the best place to soak in the sunlight.

“...Hmph.”

“...Hrmph.”

There was another person out at the balcony table. The sight of her caused my bright day to turn a little darker.

“Eating out here, Kohaku?”

“I could ask the same of you, Luli.” I narrowed my eyes at the Dragon sitting opposite to me. She looked like a baby, but much like me, she was a Heavenly Beast summoned by my master.

I hated her guts, to be frank. I didn’t like talking to her, and she always gave me a headache. I was hungry, but the sight of her made me want to leave my lunch behind.

I silently stared at my meal, ignoring the dragon as best I could. I took a bite. It was wonderful. I was happy that the quality of meals had risen considerably in recent months. The food alone was enough for me to be thankful that my master had called me to this world.

“Kougyoku visited me not long ago...”

“Hm?” I raised my head and turned to the Dragon as she spoke. I wondered what Kougyoku wanted with Luli.

That irritating Dragon was in charge of looking after the castle, and her dependents would occasionally watch the skies around the immediate area.

“She said that there are suspicious people in town. Isn’t that supposed to be your job? Have you been lazing around?”

“Oh, that’s no big deal. I currently have a very talented individual scouting out information.”

“Oh, is that right? Are you sure you’re on top of it? If you’re shirking your responsibilities our lord wouldn’t like that very much, would he? Are you sure you’re not just napping and eating instead of taking care of this country?”

“Silence! I’m trying to enjoy my meal and you’re ruining it with your prattle!”

“Ha! That’s all you care about, isn’t it? Sometimes I wonder if you even... Bwah!”

“Hold your tongue, you little... Gwah!”

Renne walked toward us both and grabbed us by our heads. *H-Hey, knock it off!*

“C’mon you lot... If ya keep on like this then Touya’s gonna get proper mad at you, right? Enjoy your lunch instead.”

“Gh... But...”

“Gah... M-Miss Renne, please don’t tell him!”

This was bad. Our master had prohibited fighting between Luli and I. Even if we were just verbally bickering, I didn’t exactly want to get punished because of her taunting.

After all... The punishment I’d incur was... so terrible...

From the looks of Luli, she remembered the punishment too. She was visibly trembling.

I decided to just silently curse her instead. Eventually, we were freed from Renne's grasp, and Luli finished up her meal.

"Either way, call on me if you need me to take care of it. I'm not against assisting in national affairs."

"Very well. I don't think I'll need you, but I'll keep it in mind."

Luli flapped her wings and took off from the balcony. I'd only call on her if the situation became really dire.

For the most part, I just needed to be sure that our master wasn't inconvenienced.

I finished up my meal, had Renne wipe off my mouth with a napkin, and then headed back into town after a brief rest.

I hoped Mr. Mittens was seeing good results from his investigation.



When I returned to the town, a couple of cats caught my attention. Apparently, Mr. Mittens had discovered something.

The cats guided me around the back of the bar next to the guild. There I found Mr. Mittens and the three cat musketeers. If I recalled correctly they were named Aramis, Athos, and Porthos. When I appeared before them, they all crouched down on one knee as if bowing.

"No need to bow. What did you uncover?"

"Ah. We discovered that the suspicious merchants did not stay in the Silver Moon Inn, which would be the usual stopping point for men of their profession. Instead, they're staying on the outskirts of

town, at the Forest's Harmonium Inn." Athos, one of the three knights, spoke up.

Hmm... This is interesting, but not exactly conclusive. The Forest's Harmonium isn't exactly a bad place, but every merchant tends to stay in the Silver Moon because it's in the middle of town, and an ideal hub for trade operations...

Plus, there were a lot of knights in the area due to the locale. It was the safest inn you could imagine. It didn't make sense that they'd stay at the Forest's Harmonium, since that place was an adventurer's inn. That made me think maybe they had a problem with the knights in town.

"We've been keeping watch, but neither the merchants nor their escorts have left their room in a while. They may still be sleeping."

"Are they traveling with adventurers? You'd think they'd have stopped by the guild..."

"Also, here's the damning evidence. I inspected their cargo, and it's several bundles of beastwood under a protective sheet. It's highly likely that the beastwood found by the Black Monarchs fell from their wagon. The amount we found would be sufficient enough to cause a massive stampede if it was strategically placed throughout town. Even with our protective barrier in place, it would majorly disrupt our economy and I'm sure any magical beasts outside the town would come in as close as they could. The roads would end up being shut down, and the citizens would effectively be locked in."

Hrmm... That'd be really bad. All trade activity would end up ceasing, and we'd be unable to get fresh supplies... The only positive out of this would be the adventurers would be able to make a ton of money by killing the monsters...

"I'm pawstitive that they plan on burning all the wood around town at night! They'll set the beastwood down and then get the heck meowtta here!"

I agreed with Mr. Mittens. If they did it in broad daylight, they'd be found out in a flash. Plus, beastwood had a very strong scent that could easily be sniffed out. There weren't as many people out at night... Especially not in the shopping district.

"So did you manage to identify them, as well?"

"We did. According to the information network we employed, these men hail from Sandora. They were once slavers. Perhaps they seek to destroy this country as an act of retribution..."

Sandora... Ah, that's the slave country my master destroyed. Given how close that country was to the Sea of Trees. It makes sense they'd have access to beastwood.

They'd probably lost their slaves, and their livelihood with it, so they'd come here in an act of defiant revenge.

They likely figured that since this was such a small country, the destruction of its castle town would be easy. How naive.

"Keep watching them for now. If they take action, inform me right away."

"Very well!"

With any luck, they'd leave without doing anything shady, and we could just confiscate the beastwood. But if they decided to act against the nation, we'd just take them out.

I hoped they'd see the error of their ways and leave.

Night eventually fell. And some time after midnight, a cat came over to get me.

"...So they've done it, then."

They were idiots, clearly. Seemed like I had to teach them a personal lesson.

◇ ◇ ◇

Shadowy figures moved under the cover of night. They moved through the quietest streets and alleys, away from anyone else who may be awake at such a late hour. In their hands were dried out pieces of wood.

One of the men stood in a back alley behind a store and crushed up some of the wood with a small hammer.

According to their boss, it would be better to ignite small pieces. They'd call less attention that way.

One was on guard while the other set to work. But suddenly, they heard a noise, which made them stand to attention.

"Meooow..." A black cat innocently walked out from a nearby bush.

"...Just a cat..."

"Cats freak me out... Hurry up with the fire."

"...Got it."

The second man rushed to start lighting up the small pieces. But again he stopped after hearing a sound.

"Meooow!"

"Guh... Another cat? Why does this town have so many?"

"H-Hey... Isn't this a little weird...?"

The fire-starting man stood up and looked around uneasily. Something felt wrong. Even though there was nobody around, he could feel eyes on him.

"Meow..."

"Meooow..."

"Mew... Meeew..."

"Hiss..."

Several eyes gleamed in the pitch black of night. From beneath porches, from the tops of nearby trees, from the heights of the nearby rooftops, and from nearby bushes.

White. Black. Tabby. Calico. Toygers. All manner of cats emerged and began staring at the men.

“H-Hey... What the hell is going on?”

“I don’t like this...!”

“Are you scared, wastrels?”

A voice rang out from the black, causing the men to unsheathe their blades. They looked around, but they couldn’t identify the source. They didn’t know who the voice belonged to, or where it was even coming from.

“Do you men know what those hunks of wood are for?”

“Wh-Who are you?! Come out!”

Beneath the pale moonlight, the gathered cats parted left and right. From the middle of the crowd walked a little white cat. It looked almost like a baby tiger.

Even though it looked juvenile and unimposing, the men felt an immense surge of dread. They might as well have been facing down a dragon.

“...No answer, hm? That’s fine. You’ll have plenty of time to answer in prison.”

“A talking cat?!”

“Bold of you to assume I’m a cat, profligate!”

A white puff of smoke ejected itself into the air, and from within the misty manifestation emerged an enormous, snarling white tiger. The two men tried to scream, only to find their voices caught in their throats.

“Listen well, mortals. My name is Kohaku! I am a Heavenly Beast, direct servant to the most esteemed Mochizuki Touya, grand duke of Brunhild! I am one of the guardians of this nation, do you hear me?!”

“Wh-Wh-What...?!”

“Deal with them, kitties.”

A cacophony of hisses and howls rang out into the night. The men could do nothing as they were swarmed by over a hundred feral cats. They were so immobilized with fear that they couldn’t even draw their swords. They fell to the ground and were bitten, scratched, and aggressively nuzzled.

As if on cue, a cat knight jumped from the rooftop, his rapier flashing in the moonlight as he descended.

“It’s curtains for you, fellas! Time to hit paws on your entire operation!”

“Gwah?!”

“Hngh?!”

The two men stopped moving entirely once they were struck by his blade. It had been enchanted with **[Paralyze]**.

The crowd of cats stopped attacking the men and dispersed into the dark.

Countless little kitty footsteps could be heard marching into the distance. Only the white tiger and the cat knight remained.

“Kohaku! Sir Mittens!”

“...My name is D’Artagnan!”

Mr. Mittens put his hands on his hips and glared at Lanz, the knight who had called out to him and the tiger next to him. He grumbled a little toward Kohaku, but calmed down after a while.

“Kohaku... What is going on here?”

“Ah, well. These men were attempting to ignite this beastwood, it would have caused all nearby magical beasts to rampage and surround the town. There are likely others doing the same elsewhere in town, but the other cat knights have been sent to take care of them. I’m going to take out their leader, a merchant. Would you like to come with me?”

“Alright! You three, take these two men into custody. You two, head to the other locations! The rest of us will head with Kohaku and Sir Mittens to capture the ringleader!”

The two men were dragged off. Kohaku returned to her kitten-like state and called out to the remaining knights.

“Hear me now! We are the Guardians of Brunhild! We cannot forgive those who would seek to harm our home! We will capture them, and force them to repent!”

The men all cheered in response, following the white tiger into the night.

Some time later, the Sandoran merchant and all of his cohorts were arrested. The night became peaceful once more.



I am a tiger. My name is Kohaku. That name means “noble protector.” It didn’t always mean that, but it means that now. That’s what I decided it means. Hmm... And today I overslept. The incident last night took a lot out of me, after all... But this is still an unseemly thing to do.

I dipped my face into the cool water fountain in the courtyard. I rubbed one of my front paws against my eyes. It would be most uncouth if I appeared before my lord with a sleepy face.

There, that should do it. I’m quite awake now.

I went to the dining room and found something rare. My master and all of his fiancées were together at the same time. It was unusual for them all to be there at once.

“Good morning, my liege. Good morning, ladies.”

“Morning, Kohaku!”

Once my master said hello, all the girls followed suit. *Hm...* They all looked well, I was happy.

Renne brought over my meal, and I sat at a smaller table by the side of their main table. *Ooh... It's roast beef today, is it? I'm certainly fond of dishes like this...*

Well, then... Time to dig in!

“Oh right, Kohaku. I heard you helped out a lot yesterday.”

Just as I was about to tuck into my delicious roast beef, my master called to me.

“Hm? A-Ah, yes! There were people trying to do something bad in town, so I handled it. I had everyone arrested, they're in the jail right now.”

“That's great, thanks Kohaku... I'm really proud of you, I'm sure you'll keep it up.”

He came over and gently patted my head. His brides-to-be followed suit, showering me in praise.

I wasn't exactly fond of being petted too much, but I'd be lying if I said I didn't enjoy the positive attention from people who meant so much to me.

Still, all I had done was fulfill the task I was assigned with... But if they wanted to praise me for that, I was hardly going to complain.

I did owe my victory yesterday to the efforts of Mr. Mittens and his musketeer cohorts, so I decided that I'd treat them to some good

food. The knight order as well, and I couldn't forget about the strays who helped subdue the two men. I was sure they'd be happy to receive recognition for their actions.

As I planned out my day ahead, I tucked into that delicious bowl of roast beef. It was just as yummy as I'd hoped.



Chapter I: The Egret Emissaries

“Strike true, Light! Sparkling Holy Lance: [Shining Javelin]!”

The beam of light flew toward its target like an arrow.

The stone statue shaped like a King Ape was completely obliterated.

After that, several **[Shining Javelin]** shots were released successively, without any chants, headed toward their own targets.

It didn’t take much time at all for all ten statues to fall apart.

“How’s that? Not bad, right?”

“Not bad at all. Good work, Sue.” Sue grinned and puffed her chest out, so I patted her on the head. Given that she was only 11, she was extremely gifted to pull it off.

Sue had an aptitude for Light magic. Light spells were also known as Holy spells and tended toward the defensive or healing side. They were also used to purify corruption.

But there were still plenty of offensive capabilities for that particular school of magic. There were spells like **[Shining Javelin]**, **[Light Arrow]**, and **[Starbright]** that could burn enemies with holy fire.

Sue had been learning magic from Linze and Leen in her spare time and had already become adept enough to cast several high-tier spells.

She’d also been learning more about self-defense from Yae and Lapis, our head maid. She’d also been learning about precision techniques and knife-throwing from Cecile, our other maid. Seemed like she’d been absorbing all that knowledge like an eager little sponge.

She was definitely way stronger than the average adventurer, despite her age.

It was possible that was because she was a beneficiary of my divinity, but I think she had a lot of talent in her to begin with.

“Still, I’m not tough enough yet! I’m gonna be one of your wives, so I can’t fall behind! I’ll get strong enough to protect all of Brunhild!” She seemed determined. I smiled and took one of her hands into my own.

“Thank you, Sue... But don’t push yourself, alright? Strong or weak, that kind of thing doesn’t bother me. I like you for you, Sue.”

“I’m not pushing myself, don’t worry. You’re important to me, Touya. That’s why I have to work hard, so feel free to spoil me plenty as a reward!” Sue giggled and wrapped her arms around my neck. *Spoil you, huh... I can’t do too much, now.*

I leaned in and hugged her back.

“By the by, Touya...”

“Hmm?”

“Is it true you have another woman following you around?”

“Huh?!”

Wh... What are you talking about?! “Up in Babylon... There’s a new woman, right? Cesca told me. She wears glasses and has a cute dog, right?”

“Wait! It’s not what you think! She’s just here for engineering and tech support!” *You stupid pervert maid! Don’t tell Sue weird stuff!* Sue released her grip on me and let out a small sigh. Then she shook her head and folded her arms together. I wondered where she even learned that kind of world-weary pose.

“My father told me that you look like a man who’ll suffer many women problems, Touya. He told me to be careful that you don’t get in trouble with strange ladies, too.”

“That isn’t what’s happening here!” Damn it, Duke Ortlinde! Don’t tell her weird stuff like that... What do you even mean by that?! Trouble with women... Huh...? No way, no way... That definitely can’t be the case. The trouble has to be over at this point, right? It won’t keep coming up, right? Please.

Sue kept on lecturing me for a bit, despite my protests, and by the end of it all, I think she had been reassured properly.

“You’re useless without us girls, Touya!”

“Y-Yeah, sure am...” Sue was cheery again, so I let her hold on to my arm, and we started walking back to the castle. The skies above us were clear, despite the fact that there was a bad storm just a few days beforehand.



I was able to ask the nature spirits to keep environmental disasters away from Brunhild, but I decided not to ask them to interfere unless it was something seriously dangerous.

“How’s Ellen doing?”

“Good! Her tummy got really big lately. I wanna have a little brother, I think.” Sue’s mother was heavily pregnant, which might have been one of the reasons she was so studiously working on her magic.

Sue had even been spending time in the Belfast castle town clinic and healing people there with her own magic reserves. She was definitely a kindhearted girl.

That didn’t mean she couldn’t be a little bullheaded and needy sometimes, though.

“...Touya. There’s something weird up there.”

“Huh?” Sue pointed out toward the sky above the castle.

Something was flying this way, but it was too far away to make out clearly.

“Is it a bird?”

“**[Long Sense].**” I projected my sense of sight toward the object with my Null spell.

Just as Sue suspected, it was a bird. But this bird was highly unusual... There was a person riding on it.

It was a huge bird, too. A goddamn giant bird. It was so big that I wondered if it was some kind of Behemoth... And then I realized there were three of them, with one rider on each.

I wondered maybe if they were trying to launch an attack on the town, but then they changed their course and landed in the plains north of the castle.

“...That’s a big bird.”

“Three of them, actually. Let’s check it out.” I used **[Teleport]** to immediately bring us to the plains. We came out right on top of a hill, in front of the people and their mounts.

There were two men and one woman. They wore fairly tribal clothing, it kind of reminded me of the stuff they wore in the Sea of Trees, but it was a little different.

They had feathered headdresses and feathery decorations adorning their shoulders, it kind of reminded me of an Aztec aesthetic. They seemed similar to Native American clothing as well...

Hm... They have red-brown skin... What country has that kind of population? Don’t tell me they’re from the Reverse World... “Your Highness!” As I was pondering to myself, Vice-Captain Nikola and several knights came charging in from behind me. They’d probably seen the birds.

Before approaching the visitors, I waited for Nikola to catch up.

“Hello there. What brings you to my country?”

“I am an emissary from Egret! Our mission in this land is to bring a letter from our king to the grand duke of Brunhild.” The tallest of the three, a man with white feathers on his head, spoke up clearly.

Egret was a country to the south-west, it was a relatively small island in the ocean that bordered Mismede and Belfast.

From what I recall, the nation of Egret was founded by a tribe from the Sea of Trees that sailed out to find new land. Seemed like my initial assessment wasn’t too far off.

I'd been there once, too. Back when I was looking for Babylon pieces, I found the access point for the research laboratory there. I hadn't really done any sightseeing, though. I only touched down in that one Dragon's territory.

Egret's a pretty nice place to live, as far as I know... Wonder why they came all the way out here...

I stepped out toward the three people and cleared my throat.

"Very well, I'll accept your letter. I am Mochizuki Touya, Grand Duke of Brunhild." The three of them ran as pale as their skin tones would let them after hearing my introduction. After a few moments, they knelt down and presented a scroll to me.

Guess I don't have much of a royal aura to me, huh... Gimme a break, guys... I know I'm young, but the Palouf Kingdom has a ten-year-old in charge! Should I grow a beard or something? Nah... Probably wouldn't suit me.

I opened up the container and popped out the scroll, then I broke the wax seal and started reading what it said.

Let's see here... Hm... Hmhm... Ah...

"What's it say?"

"Well... It's a request for help." Apparently, the recent storm had caused massive issues in Egret territory. Their crops had been destroyed by flash floods, they'd lost almost all their fishing and naval ships, and their food reserves were obliterated. There weren't many deaths, but a lot of people were seriously injured.

They were unable to ask for help from places like Belfast, Refreese, or Mismede because they didn't have any ships in good enough condition to make port there.

That's why they used their giant birds to come to me for help.

To be honest, Brunhild couldn't exactly give them much in the way of supplies. We were a small nation, so it wasn't like we were rolling in food. We needed to prioritize our own people first, even if that seemed harsh.

But I didn't see why I couldn't ask the members of the League of Nations to offer a small offering to Egret each. If they did that, then I'd be able to warp it all to Egret with my magic pretty quickly.

It would probably take a while, though... Every country in the world had something or other going on. Wasn't like they could just pause their important operations for foreign aid.

"Would you be able to come to the castle with me? I'll contact the other nations about this, but it may take some time. In the meantime... Would it be okay if you leave your birds here?"

"Very well, thank you." The white-feathered man nodded and stepped forward. The woman, adorned with red feathers, walked behind him. The young man with the brown feathers elected to stay behind and tend to the birds.

I asked, and I was told the birds were called Luphus. They'd been selectively bred for their gigantism. Apparently, they were domesticated by the Luphu tribe, despite their Behemoth status.

The entire tribe only had five of these birds, though.

The leader of the three emissaries was the white-feathered man, who introduced himself as Totola Luphu. The red-feathered woman was Lilicala Luphu. Apparently, the two of them were brother and sister. The other man was named Locha Luphu, and he was their cousin.

Sue wanted to ride one of the Luphu birds, but I told her it wasn't the right time or place for that. Plus it could've been dangerous. She had no training.

I introduced her as my fiancée, which caused Totola and Lilicala to stare at me in wide-eyed disbelief. They didn't say anything, though.



I ended up asking the other countries in the League of Nations for support, and they all chipped in... Unfortunately, there still wasn't nearly enough.

In the end, I decided that making sure Egret had a self-sufficient food supply would be better than just giving them a band-aid answer. Their primary source of food seemed to be from fishing, so it was just a matter of replacing the fishing boats that had gotten all wrecked.

I'd be able to mass-produce replacement ships for them using Babylon's Workshop, but I'd expect adequate compensation.

But it seemed like even with that solution available, the situation wasn't quite as simple as that.

"Even with ships, we can't go out and fish right now... There's a Tentacular in the ocean."

"Oh... Right, that magic beast that's kinda like a giant squid." If I recalled correctly, the giant squid was among the largest invertebrates on Earth, and there had even been recorded claims of caught specimens as long as eighteen meters. According to what I'd read in the Guild's bestiary, the Tentacular was a magical beast far larger than that, though.

Apparently, it was capable of using its limbs to drag entire ships into the murky depths. I couldn't even begin to picture how big it was... Especially because this particular Tentacular was said to be a Behemoth even among its peers.

I'd summoned a Kraken once, but even that thing wasn't quite as scary as a Tentacular.

"Wait, doesn't Egret have the serpent's protection?" I remember when I met with the Dragon around Egret, that the sea serpent was like a protector of the coastline. He was a kindhearted sort that protected the waters, and he was one of Luli's kin as well.

I didn't think someone as nice as him would just ignore the presence of a fierce Tentacular in the region.

"The serpent did fight with the Tentacular... But he vanished shortly after. We don't believe he died, but... We believe he was defeated."

Yikes... He lost? Guess the Tentacular must be all kinds of gigantic, then... Wonder how it tastes... If I go kill it, then that might solve the food shortage! Hell, we could dry it out for long-lasting snacks.

I muttered the suggestion, but the siblings simply frowned and shook their heads. *What... C'mon. You guys don't eat squid? I thought Egret's main food source was fishing! Bah, I guess it's just cultural differences. It isn't like I'm gonna force you guys to eat it or anything, I don't even know how it tastes!*

Personally, I didn't enjoy eating squid. The squishy texture was uncomfortable along my tongue, and if you boiled it or fried it, it basically retained its consistency the same way. I only really enjoyed dried squid, because at least that had a bit of crunch to it.

I shrugged my shoulders and decided I'd take care of it, either way.

I didn't really want to fight it underwater if I could avoid it, so I hoped I could come up with some kind of solution...

I used **[Recall]** on Totola to gain location information on the capital city of Egret, Retrobamba. Then I opened up a **[Gate]**. Just as I was about to walk through, Sue opened her mouth.

“Hold it! I don’t wanna stay home all the time. Take me with you this time, Touya. A husband must listen to his wife’s demands now and then, right? That’s the rule.”

I sighed quietly, muttering something about how I wasn’t exactly going there to goof around. My other fiancées, who had made their way into the greeting room individually at some point, also decided they wanted to come.

I didn’t exactly think it was proper to bring an entire entourage of my betrothed when meeting the king of Egret for the first time, so I managed to convince them to reduce the number of people to just two others plus Sue. Three was a crowd, but it was unavoidable...

Thus, a heated match of rock-paper-scissors began between the remaining eight girls.

The Luphu twins just stared in confusion at my overenthusiastic fiancées.

I get it... I really do. This is entirely ridiculous. I know. But just keep quiet, please.

“I did it!”

“I won... V for Victory...” Linze and Sakura ended up winning.

The girls who lost demanded we bring back souvenirs. They really were treating it like some kind of vacation...

Given that it was a beautiful tropical island, it would’ve been a perfect vacation destination, though...

I decided to bring Sango and Kokuyou with me as well, just in case. I didn’t want an underwater conflict to break out, but I couldn’t discount the possibility.

“So... How big is the Tentacular?”

“We don’t know. We’ve only really seen the head and some of its limbs above water. Most eyewitness reports put it around the same size as our guardian serpent, though.” ... *That means it’s at least fifty meters! How am I supposed to deal with that, dang it... If I try to use [Gate] to warp it on to land, that might work... But I could end up causing another flood if I accidentally warp seawater with it.*

Maybe a Frame Gear...? No... That’s not how it works... Or maybe, hm... I guess I could craft some orichalcum into a rod and twine with [Modeling]... Yeah, let’s go fishing...

Hm... How does squid fishing even work? I grinned softly to myself as I took out my smartphone and began searching for some how-to guides on catching squid with a rod.

The Kingdom of Egret was formed out of two separate islands. There was the longer Egrand island that stretched from north to south, and the smaller Mallet island that was more enclosed, and around a third the size of the other one.

Sue, Linze, Sakura, Sango, Kokuyou, and I all warped to Mallet island.

The three Luphu tribespeople had walked through the **[Gate]** to Retrobamba ahead of us, while my group went to Mallet island to check up on the sea serpent.

The sea serpent’s home was also the cave that contained the teleporter that took me to the Babylon Research Lab, so I just opened up a portal straight there. We came out into the open area. The whole place felt like a secret base, complete with an underground lake.

“Touya, look...” Linze pointed across the water, right toward the sea serpent. He was laying there with wounds covering his entire form.

His upper body was prone against the ground, while the rest of him was beneath the surface. Blood was oozing from his wounds, and his magnificent sapphire-blue scales were shredded and peeling in places.

His breathing was hoarse and ragged, and it seemed like he used all of his energy just to open his eyes and look at me. I placed my hand against him and closed my eyes. *Hold on, buddy...*

“Come forth, Light! Calm of the Goddess: [Mega Heal]!”

A wave of light began to ripple across the Dragon’s body, healing him in a matter of seconds. His scales regained their sheen and luster as well.

“You okay?”

“I am. You have my gratitude, o Mochizuki Touya, he who stands above Mistress Luli. Forgive me for showing to you my disgrace.”

“I heard about what happened from the Egret guys. You fought the Tentacular and lost?”

“That I did. They intruded upon my domain, so I saw fit to deal with them... But their tentacles were stronger than I could’ve imagined... Strong enough to pulverize my organs and shatter my bones.” *...Strong enough to break a Dragon’s bones? I wonder if the Tentacular has a bit of octopus in it as well... I heard that octopus bodies are mostly made of muscle.*

Squids were also the fastest sea-dwelling invertebrates. They could even use waterjet propulsion to reach speeds of forty kilometers per hour.

The situation seemed a lot direr than I first expected.

“I’ve been tasked with taking care of the monster, so please rest up a bit. Once I kill it, you can continue looking after Egret.”

“Thank you... I am unworthy.” The sea serpent bowed its head to me, which was quite a human trait...

But still, something the Dragon had said worried me.

“...You said ‘they,’ didn’t you? I thought there was only one Tentacular.”

“I’m afraid not. There are multiple. I fought two of them at once and was forced to flee when a third entered the fray. I am not entirely sure if there are more than that.” *Three at the very least...? This situation’s sounding worse by the minute.*

I sighed quietly and shook my head, then dispelled my bad thoughts before waving goodbye to the Dragon. I opened up a **[Gate]** to the capital city, prepared to deal with this situation and then get out.



“So this is Retrobamba, eh? Quite aesthetically pleasing, isn’t it?” Sue looked around as she spoke. She was right. The city was situated on a hillside by the ocean, and we had a good view of the white sandy beach lined with palm trees. The water looked clean and inviting.

If you were to look to the sky, you’d see tropical birds flying overhead. If you were to look around the ground, you’d see vibrant greenery. The stone buildings in the city all looked beautiful, as well. There was a tower in the distance, and some kind of well-constructed shrine as well. I could also see something that resembled an Aztec pyramid.

There was a mountain range a little bit away, and it was covered in lush greenery. The sight of the blue sky and the blue sea really made me feel like this place was the definition of natural harmony.

But looking a little more closely, one could make out broken tree branches and a few collapsed buildings. It must've been from the storm. As beautiful as this place was, it had clearly been scarred.

The massive building I saw in the center of Retrobamba was probably the king's castle. We decided to head down the streets toward it.

"The citizens seem... Demoralized?"

"That's not exactly surprising. There are Tentaculars circling their island, there's a famine going on, and they can't even go to the mountains due to mudslides." Linze had pointed out the lifeless people around us, but I'd already taken note of just how miserable everyone seemed.

Not every town was hit this badly, but it seemed like morale was down across the board.

The capital was still presentable, but apparently, the mountain towns and most of their fishing-centric towns had suffered catastrophic damage. There were landslides and flooding all over the place, which caused congestion on the roads between cities as well. They couldn't even organize relief along their sea routes due to the Tentacular problem.

I saw a horse-drawn carriage coming down the road ahead of us. Although it wasn't exactly right to call it horse-drawn. It was being pulled by birds. The birds resembled ostriches, except they were a hell of a lot beefier. Their necks were thick.

The bird-drawn carriage stopped right in front of us. It didn't have a roof, so I identified the one in the driver's seat immediately. It was Lilicala.

"We've come to bring you to our king, he's waiting for you."
Nice, we got a free ride to the castle. Thanks, lady!

Just as we were about to board the carriage, we heard a loud commotion from the nearby beach. Then things descended into a full-on uproar.

We looked down on to the sandy shore and saw a massive squid-like creature. It was mostly submerged, but I could make out part of its head, and it was using its tentacles to attack people down there.

They can get this close to shore?! One of the tentacles reached down and wrapped itself around a man, plucking him from the ground. Tentaculars were carnivores, and mostly fed on the meat of shark and whale-like magical beasts, but now and then they were known to eat humans.

“Come forth, Water! Feel My Blade, Both Cold and Clear: [Aqua Cutter]!” Sakura summoned a blade of water, which cleanly sliced through the tentacle that was wrapped around the poor man.

He fell to the ground and ran away in a panic, the tentacle piece spewing blue blood. Linze immediately followed up with an attack of her own.

“Come forth, Fire! Purgatorial Sphere of Flames: [Fireball]!” The massive fireball she summoned exploded against the exposed head of the Tentacular.

“Prrrgyaaaaah!!” The Tentacular let out a hideous shriek and retreated into the waves below. I followed it up with a couple Fire spells of my own, but the Tentacular completed its descent before any of them landed.

“It got away... Shame...”

“That one was smaller than I thought.”

“Maybe it was a baby?” Child or not, it was still a monster to me.

The tentacle that Linze had sliced off was still writhing on the beach. Looking at it made me feel sick.

I could understand why going out on a boat would be an issue with those things around. ... *Wait, I should check if we're dealing with three of those things, anyway... If I'm unlucky then there might even be five or something.*

"Run search. Tentaculars in the ocean around the Kingdom of Egret."

"Searching... Search Complete. Fifty-three Tentaculars Found."

"You what?!" I could barely even find words. I had to check again to see if my smartphone was busted.

Even if that counted the young ones, that was far too many... Squids laid thousands of eggs at a time, but according to the bestiary, Tentaculars only laid clutches of a few dozen, and of those eggs under ten typically survived childhood.

I wondered if this was another unintended effect of the two worlds merging together...

I hopped down to the beach and switched Brunhild to Blade Mode. I slashed at the tentacle on the sand.

It was coated in a sticky liquid that partially deflected the slash, so my cut wasn't as deep as it should've been. I tried thrusting the tip of the blade into the tentacle and was met with more success.

The tentacle started writhing again after I stabbed it. I felt like I was gonna barf.

A sword-wielder as talented as Yae would easily be able to slice its tentacles off, but it'd become harder with the really big ones. Magic-crafted blades seemed to be better here, for whatever reason.

"What schools of magic are the Tentaculars weak to, Linze?"

"Fire, Light, and... Oh, Lightning spells from the Wind school! If we're talking Water, then slashing spells like **[Aqua Cutter]** also work wonders. Something like **[Maelstrom]** would basically do nothing."

That made sense. The only issue was that offensive Lightning, Water, and Fire spells were a lot less useful in the water. Light magic would also be diminished, due to water refracting it.

Maybe I really should drag them out on to land, then... Am I really gonna end up fishing? As I pondered to myself, a dark-skinned man with a golden feather plume on his head walked toward me. He was accompanied by a few soldiers. Totola and Lilicala were standing by his side.

He seemed to be in his thirties or so. He wore thin garments that felt very native American, and he had intricate tribal tattoos all over his chiseled abs.

"Thank you for fighting off the beast, Grand Duke of Brunhild. You have my gratitude."

"Who are you, exactly?"

"I am Lefang Letra, son of Lelaure Cocha. I preside over the Kingdom of Egret." It was the king himself. He seemed like some kind of war veteran, so I hadn't expected him to be royalty.

I reached out my hand to shake his. His shake was firm and tight. He clearly had the look and grip of a warrior who spent every day working toward self-improvement.

"I am Mochizuki Touya, grand duke of Brunhild. It's a pleasure to meet you, King Lefang." I introduced the girls standing behind me. Instead of introducing them just as my fiancées, I stressed that they were competent mages. I didn't want him to think I was treating his country as a family resort.

There were many witnesses that corroborated the story of the girls casting strong magic, so he didn't seem suspicious of us.

"I've cast a spell to calculate exactly how many Tentaculars there are around the island, and... There are over fifty of them."

“Fifty?! Impossible... How can we ever hope to begin fishing again?”

“My country has prepared an entire new fleet of ships for you to use, all that’s left is to kill the monsters... There’s only one issue. I’d find it a lot easier if I could drag them out on to land...” The king told me about a small coastal area away from the capital that we’d be able to go nuts on, so I decided that’d be the area we’d reserve for wiping out the Tentaculars.

Now, for the other matter.

“Kokuyou. Can you eat this?”

“I’m not sssure, darling. It isssn’t exactly poissonousss, sssso you ssshould be able to eat it. I can’t guarantee a good tassste, though.” Kokuyou shrugged. At least it felt like a shrug. He was a snake and didn’t actually have shoulders.

I used **[Analyze]** and confirmed that it wasn’t poisonous. It was safe to eat, but I wouldn’t know about the taste until I actually tried it.

I used my smartphone to look up if raw squid had anything nasty in it, and apparently, some species contained an unpleasant amount of ammonia. Thankfully my use of **[Analyze]** had confirmed that the Tentaculars didn’t have any nasty surprises inside.

The tentacle stopped writhing, so I rubbed off the slimy stuff and applied liberal amounts of salt. I then took a plate out of **[Storage]**, and sliced off a thin bit of the tentacle.

I took out some Eashen-bought soy sauce and ginger from my **[Storage]** as well, then I ground up the ginger into a paste and mixed it all up on the plate. *Behold, mortals. I have brought squid somen unto the world.*

“Grand Duke... Do you really intend to consume that?”

"If this goes well, it could put an end to your famine. I don't personally like it all that much, but in both Eashen and my homeland, there are squid-based dishes similar to this... That's why it can't hurt to try." Eashenese cuisine featured octopus and squid as staple parts of the diet. Besides... It wasn't poison, so it was edible. Sort of. All I needed to do was determine the taste...

Here goes nothing... The Egret natives all backed up, and I took up my chopsticks. Then I shoveled some of the Tentacular somen into my mouth after dipping it in the ginger-soy mixture. *Huh.*

"H-How is... It?" Linze nervously spoke up.

"It's... Okay? I don't like the texture, but everything else about it seems fine. It actually tastes okay. I think people who like this kind of stuff will be happy."

"Let me try..." Sakura tried some of it right after me. Sue, Sango, Kokuyou, and then Linze followed suit.

"Surprisingly yummy..."

"Not quite to my tassstess."

"I quite like the texture on this one. I think if you swap out the sauces, it would end up being pretty nice in a lot of different ways." They all seemed to think differently, but that confirmed that at the very least, someone out there would probably enjoy it. It kind of tasted like a combination of squid and octopus, and it was a little sweet. It would probably work if I cut it up into sashimi, as well.

The Egret natives looked at us uneasily, but Totola's curiosity got the better of him. He took a bite, and then his sister did as well.

"...It isn't exactly delicious, but it seems fine."

"I quite like it, actually... I like this sauce..." It seemed like quite the divisive meal. After a short while, the king ended up trying the food.

“...Hmph. It isn’t as bad as I expected. I hated the idea, but... Actually trying it kind of dispelled the fear. Yes, I could see myself eating this again... But personally, I prefer a stronger kind of taste.” He didn’t especially enjoy it, but that didn’t surprise me too much.

Guess I can try out other squid recipes, then. I began concocting other recipes. Fried squid in batter, sweet and sour squid stir fry, grilled squid with garlic sprouts, butter squid in soy sauce, and fried squid with ginger... After they watched me making a few things, it seemed like the Egret natives around me started coming to the realization that Tentacular could be used as an ingredient. A few professional chefs from the castle were called out and began making Egret-styled food out of the meat.

The pros definitely did a much better job with the food than I did. I especially enjoyed whatever the hell “Tentacular stir-fry with parse grass” was.

It was pretty easy to make long-lasting preserved food out of squid, too. So the same rule probably held true for Tentaculars.

...Yep, I’m gonna have to fish the rest of them out.

Using the Frame Gears of the girls with me would probably make it trivial. Sue’s Ortlinde Overlord was the strongest of all the Valkyries, after all. We’d definitely be able to pull the Tentaculars out of the ocean using that.

Since we wanted to use them for food, we needed to take care not to damage their bodies. *Wait, that reminds me... My grandpa told me the best way to kill a squid or octopus, once... Something about a one-hit killer blow...*

I searched it up on the internet.

Let’s see here... Wait... ‘Thrust an icepick straight into its forehead’? Ugh... That’s so gross!

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“This should be fine, sir!”

“Hm... Not bad at all. This ought to work perfectly, I think.” I sat in the Babylon Workshop, looking over a ship that had recently been made. It was shaped like a sailboat, but was completely lacking in sails. Not to mention the fact that the rear of the ship had been remodeled into a thin needle shape that pointed downward into the water.

The ship would serve as a lure for the Tentaculars. Since it was just a lure, it was basically hollowed out. It was still reinforced to prevent it from being broken, though.

Typically you fished for squid in the open ocean, but Tentaculars attacked the boats. That was why we made the ship itself into bait. The moment the monsters latched on, Sue’s Ortlinde Overlord would drag them to shore.

There were a few issues that prevented me from using **[Gate]** underwater, and I’d have to touch them directly to use **[Teleport]**, plus I couldn’t actually use **[Teleport]** on something so huge.

Once they were dragged to shore, Linze would penetrate their hearts with her Fragarach. Assuming they were the same as squids in terms of organ structure, their hearts would be located between their eyes.

According to my research, severing the nerves at those key points would be enough to kill the squids.

Either way, a stab between the eyes should be enough to kill them... In theory, at least. If their hearts were located elsewhere, we’d just have to make do.

It was time to see if it’d work out.

A crashing sound reverberated through the air as the golden giant made landfall on Egret’s territory.

Sue's Frame Gear stood tall at thirty meters in height.

Its orichalcum and phrasium-coated body caused it to shimmer beneath the tropical sun. The massive fishing line in its hand was threaded through the lure boat.

I'd used **[Modeling]** to reduce several pieces of orichalcum to strands, and then bunch them together. It was thicker than my own body, several times over... So I couldn't imagine it breaking easily.

"Alright, let's give it a go." Sakura and Linze stood by in their Frame Gears behind Ortlinde Overlord, prepared just in case.

The lure ship we were using was connected to the mainland via the fishing line, so I couldn't use **[Gate]** to send it out to the deeper parts of the ocean.

Instead, I used **[Gravity]** to reduce its weight, then had Linze carry it out to the depths.

I hopped on to the ship and had Linze carry both me and the ship out to the ocean.

The ship was just bait, so it had no means of moving around, that's why Sue gently tugged on the fishing line to make it move around.

The Tentaculars wouldn't have seen a ship in the area for a few days, so I hoped they'd take the bait.

I looked down at the emerald-green surface below the water.

The seabed was typically pure white due to the sand and coral residue, but water absorbed more of the red spectrum in our light perception which resulted in our eyes seeing the water and anything beneath it as emerald green.

The deeper the water, the bluer the surface would be, but at the point, I was at, it was barely green-ish. The coastline nearby was a little too shallow for that. I probably needed to go out deeper to see

the surface turn bluer. As I pondered to myself, a tentacle suddenly whooshed out of the water and wrapped itself around the lure.

“It’s time!” More tentacles shot out of the water, wrapping themselves around the ship entirely.

“Sue!” I used **[Fly]** to blast into the sky and yelled into my smartphone.

“On it!”

The lure ship suddenly began hurtling toward the coast, and the needle installed into the structure dug into one of the tentacles.

From what I’d read, invertebrates apparently didn’t suffer pain, but I wondered if that was the case for the Tentaculars as well.

I mused about that as I watched the first of many being dragged toward the shore.

“Skraaargh!” The Tentacular’s massive body finally surfaced.

It was over twenty meters long, almost rivaling Ortlinde Overlord in terms of sheer size. Still, it wasn’t like it could stand up on land or anything.

The Tentacular tried to grab for Sue’s Frame Gear, but Sakura came in with her vocal magic to immobilize it entirely.

Without missing a beat, Linze’s Helmwige rushed down and pierced the area between the monster’s eyes using a Fragarach blade.

“Prauuuuuuuaaaaah!!” The Tentacular hissed and let out what seemed like a harrowing death rattle.

Its body suddenly changed from a fleshy color to a pale white. It was pretty similar to the videos of squid hunting I’d seen on the internet. I was relieved to see that the Tentacular had its heart in the same place.

Even if the heart was huge, the three girls could take care of it no problem.

Now all we had to do was take care of the rest. I watched Helmwig take the lure ship back out. I opened up a **[Gate]** and called down Reginleif.

I used my Frame Gear to carry the dead Tentacular a little bit away and switched my Fragarachs into two large blades.

“Uhh... Think I gotta gut it first.” I sliced open the creature at its sides and took out its eyes and internal organs. The organs might have been delicious, but I wasn’t keen to try them. Trying to handle such a huge ingredient was definitely annoying.

I used **[Gate]** to warp the organs back into the sea, where they’d probably feed some other creatures. Then I washed the Tentacular’s corpse in salt water.

Sango and Kokuyou helped using their magic to increase the concentration of salt in the water, and then I sliced up the Tentacular’s body into large chunks. I then strung the chunks up from some nearby palm trees.

The sun was strong in this nation, so it’d only take a few days for the meat to dry out... Probably. I also had no idea if the dried stuff would even taste good or not.

Our main mission here was killing the Tentaculars, the whole thing about making them into food was a thing on the side. Once they were all gone, the people would be able to fish again, so they wouldn’t be forced to eat the monsters.

“Prauueurgh!” They’d caught their second one already.

I’d kind of forgotten that I’d be doing this fifty times or so in a row... Little did I know just how tiring an effort it would become.

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“I’m pooped...” It took an entire day to kill all the Tentaculars and string their sliced corpses up along the Egret coastline.

Some of them were pretty far off, so I used **[Gate]** to transport them (and the surrounding seawater) into our fishing spot.

The stink of fish was heavy in the air, so I asked the Wind Spirits to cast the smell toward the ocean as much as possible.

I didn’t want any wild animals eating the drying food, so I cast a large-scale **[Prison]** that prevented wild beasts from entering the area. Given that it was such a broad application of the spell, it made it pretty easy to break, but I didn’t think animals would be strong enough to smash it.

I didn’t just make fried squid, either. I ended up making shredded squid and rolled squid... And I passed on the recipes to some of the local chefs as well. They’d probably be able to use those recipes to make stuff way better than an amateur like me could.

The sun began to set overhead as a delicious smell wafted over the beach. The king of Egret had his personal chefs cook up the Tentaculars that I hadn’t put out to dry, and distributed the dishes to everyone in the area.

This island didn’t seem to treat squid as a viable food until now, but the people seemed to easily come around to the idea.

The grilled Tentacular skewers looked especially yummy.

“...We truly owe you a great debt for saving our country... We can’t believe how many ships you provided us with, as well.”

“Eh, no biggie. You guys are paying us for the ships, so it’s not all charity. The supplies from the other countries should be here soon, too. I guess that’s the end of your famine.” I forced a smile as I asked the king to raise his bowed head.

We looked off the coastline at the hundreds of ships I'd manufactured in the Workshop. We'd actually mostly taken trees and lumber from Egret's territory to construct them. That coupled with the Tentacular extermination pay was more than enough compensation for me.

I didn't want to take too much from a country that was recovering from a natural disaster, so instead, I worked out an arrangement. I used my search magic to find a gold mine on a small island off the Egret coastline, and I told them about it. Once they had it operational, I'd have them pay Brunhild a cut of whatever was found in there.

The extra income from the mine would help them rebuild their towns, too.

Sue was piloting Ortlinde just off-shore, casting a wide net into the ocean and dragging back a large haul of fish. The fish were then taken by the nearby Egret citizens, who either took them home or started cooking them there and then.

Before long, there was a wide variety of food laid out on the sand.

"That looks good..."

"Please, eat to your heart's content. Most of these were caught by your fiancées, after all... Ahaha..."

There were lots of tasty-looking fish dishes lined up in front of us all, from sashimi to grilled skewers. It seemed like this place had similar cuisine to Eashen in some regards, maybe because it was an island nation as well. There wasn't any soy sauce here, though. They had mustard, vinegar, garlic, and other condiments instead.

I wanted to be sure that the fish had been seared properly, and that there weren't any parasites. I subtly used **[Analyze]** to check it out, and there were no issues.

I dipped a bit of fish into the mustard, and it tasted amazing. It was way better than the Tentacular stuff I'd cooked earlier... It would've gone even better with some white rice.

Once Sue came back to shore, we all began a lively meal. The Tentacular threat was gone, so all the locals celebrated by singing and dancing around the beach fire.

Some performers ended up showing up, playing the pan flute and singing folk songs by the bonfire. Whenever they finished, they were met with roaring applause.

After a while, Sakura stood up. She was probably unable to contain herself any longer. She wanted to sing. That meant it was my job to accompany her. I used **[Storage]** to pull out a piano and played the tune she requested.

This song, huh... Guess I'm the only one who realizes how out-of-place it is. Still, it's a western song, so it's not like anyone but me actually knows the lyrics. This song's one about missing your home, though.

Even though she was singing about it, Sakura had no idea what or where West Virginia even was. But apparently the original singer of the song hadn't even been to the state of West Virginia when he wrote the song, so that was a little funny to think about. It was written by someone else, so that wasn't too weird, though.

The Egret natives were enthralled by her song, so it didn't really matter if the lyrics weren't fitting with the current situation.

That reminded me, there was an anime movie that heavily featured the song in its plot. But the movie ended up adapting the lyrics so the teenage heroine could sing it in Japanese. Much like the title of the film, it was like everyone in the crowd was hooked on every whisper of Sakura's heart.

Once the chorus ended, and the song began its second verse, a string instrument began playing further accompaniment to the tune. I turned to look at who the artist was, and it was none other than Sousuke. He was sitting on the nearby sands, strumming his guitar.

“Huh?!” I nearly stopped playing, but quickly recovered from the stumble. I wondered when the heck he got here. I looked around at my surroundings and suddenly saw Karen eating some sashimi with a group of Egret women. I also saw Moroha and Karina lining up for some grilled squid, while Suika and Kousuke started chugging booze with some merry locals.

Oh my gods... What are you all doing here?! I was in the middle of playing, so I couldn’t go and give them the third degree. I had no choice but to continue my performance as sweat beaded on my brow.

They were gods, so they could teleport wherever they wanted, it wasn’t even technically a use of magic, just a small display of their divinity.

After the performance ended and I bowed to the wave of applause, I walked straight over to Karen. She was chowing down on some fried fish. Sousuke began playing another tune, and Sakura began singing, but my time on the stage was over.

“This stuff’s delicious, you know? You should eat some, you know.”

“I know it’s good, but why the heck are you guys here?!”

“Heard about the whole tentacle-whatever situation from Rosetta, you know? Seems like it’s a good party, so we all wanted to swing by.” Karen pointed off in a direction and I saw Linze, Sakura, and Sue, but there was also Yumina, Elze, Yae, Lu, Hilde, and Leen all sitting around and enjoying the food. Even Paula was there. She was pretending to eat.



You basically came here with everyone?! I walked over to the king of Egret and bowed my head in apology. He just laughed it off.

"I have seven wives, my friend. There's nothing to worry about here! If anything it's nice to see them all getting along so well... I'm a little jealous,ahaha!"

"O-Oh, really...? I guess it must be tough if your wives squabble, huh..." I chuckled softly and turned toward my fellow polygamist, but his face had taken on a sullen expression.

"It's like... Walking on eggshells... But the eggshells are made of knives and poison. L-Listen to me, Grand Duke... The nation prospers if your family prospers, be sure that you alleviate any concerns your women might have. If you don't... You'll suffer a fate worse than death, I promise that." He stared at me with glassy eyes, coming off like some kind of scarred veteran. *H-Hold on, what the hell happened to you?!* A few nearby soldiers flashed me a wry smile. It didn't seem like anything too serious had happened to him, but clearly whatever spousal conflicts he'd had ended up leaving an impact on him.

I decided to change the topic because the king looked extremely depressed all of a sudden. I decided to offer him the opportunity to bring Egret into the League of Nations. His expression immediately brightened up, and he responded positively.

Apparently, he'd heard good things about the alliance from the Emperor of Refreese, so he'd been hoping that we'd pass on the opportunity for him to join us.

As part of his thanks for our extermination of the Tentaculars, he said that we could use the royal beach whenever we wanted, so I decided to host a vacation event after the next League of Nations meeting.

It was rare to have a sea so beautiful as the one I was gazing out upon, and I was sure the other world leaders would love to see it, too. It'd be a prime opportunity for a beach vacation. Obviously, I'd have to make the area safe, but that could easily be handled by casting a **[Prison]** around the area that forbade dangerous marine life.

I decided that Eashen, Hannock, Ryle, Elfrau, and Palerius should be formally inducted into the League of Nations as well.

There was an issue with Eashen, though... While the Tokugawa house, run by Ieyahsu, was technically in charge of everything... The formal figurehead leader of Eashen was still the Emperor. That meant I'd probably need to meet with them and ask permission, first.

Basically, the Emperor was the one who I'd need to talk to about international relations. Ieyahsu might have been the dominant one of all the feudal lords, but the Emperor still sat above them.

... Come to think of it, I don't know a thing about the Eashen Emperor. I don't even know if they're a guy or not, or how old they are. Guess I'll ask Yae later.

Our banquet continued long into the night, stars twinkling overhead.



Chapter II: The Reunion

“I do not know much about the mikado, I do not. Such a person is far above my station, they are. I should say that we say ‘emperor’ to foreigners due to their different understanding of rulership, we do... But in Eashen we would prefer to call them the mikado, we would.” I asked Yae about the emperor, or rather, the mikado... But that was all she said in response.

This mikado seemed to be shrouded in mystery. Apparently nobody was allowed to see them, except for their personal aides and leyahsu. I wondered if they were a shut-in or something.

I decided to try contacting leyahsu and arranging a meeting.

Eashen hadn’t been inducted into the League of Nations, so none of the feudal lords had mass-produced smartphones. That meant I had to write up an official letter and send it through the Gate Mirror that led to leyahsu’s palace, and then hope for the best.

A few days later, I received a response. The letter said that the mikado would be willing to meet me. I decided to bring Yae along with me to Oedo.

“It has been a while, Touya-dono...”

“It certainly has, Lord leyahsu, I’m glad you’re looking well.” leyahsu greeted me and Yae with a huge smile. He looked a teeny bit fatter than he did the last time I’d met him.

We were quickly escorted toward a living room and served some green tea. It was really good stuff.

It’d been a while since I’d seen a tatami mat, too... Eashen was so similar to Japan that it basically felt like I was home whenever I visited.

“Thank you for the rice you gave us, it was high-grade and quite tasty. Yae’s been eating it up quite often.”

“Th-That is just because of Crea-dono’s cooking, it is! M-My chopsticks were moving on their own, they were! Wh-Wh-Why would you say something like that in front of Ieyahsu-sama?! Th-That is too cruel, Touya-dono!” Yae started flailing and puffing out her cheeks in embarrassment. I hadn’t meant it in a weird way. She was overreacting...

To be honest, I loved watching Yae eat. It warmed the cockles of my heart. It was pretty relaxing to watch her, so it was something about her that I loved.

“Gahaha, it is good to see you two getting along so well! When Yae-dono lived here in Eashen, all she focused on was the blade... She has changed a lot. Love changes a person, after all!”

“L-Love, ah... I-I... That is, it is... Uhm... Ah...” Yae’s face turned a deep shade of red and she covered her face with her hands. She peeked out from between her fingers now and then, but was met with teasing grins, causing her to retreat back again.

Gaaah, that’s so cute! What the hell?! When’d you get so cute?! I wanna hug you! I managed to restrain myself, cleared my throat, and moved on to the main subject of our visit.

“So, about the mikado...”

“The mikado is not here in Oedo, you know. They are in the imperial palace, located in Kyo... It should prove easy to reach with your teleportation magic, Touya-dono. I would like to accompany you as well.”

Kyo, huh? That’s an old name for Kyoto back on Earth... Guess it makes sense they’d be there.

I was mildly annoyed, though. Ieyahsu hadn't given away anything about the mikado's gender.

Apparently the mikado of Eashen didn't involve themselves in political matters. Each feudal lord was expected to manage their territories and deal with trouble as it came up in their own provinces. That way the country would remain perfectly balanced, as all things should be.

But, in recent years, a man surfaced with the ambition to replace the mikado. That man was Oda Nobunaga.

He sought to unite Eashen for himself and become the sole ruler, waging war on the other feudal lords for the opportunity to bring all of their territories under his. Alas, he was betrayed by Akechi Mitsuhide at Honnoji Temple and died there along with his ambition.

In retrospect, it was possible that Nobunaga's ambition was fueled by the monkey, Hashiba Hideyoshi. Damn that rotten servile god... It was entirely possible that all of Eashen's political instability was his doing.

Either way, the entire mess had caused a power imbalance in the structure of how the feudal lords controlled the land, and Ieyahsu used that opportunity to rise to the top.

I was glad that the mikado was willing to meet with me. I would've been fine with Ieyahsu joining the League of Nations as the Eashen representative, but I had a feeling the other feudal lords might have had a problem with it.

I used **[Recall]** on Ieyahsu to recover memories of Kyo, and then opened up a **[Gate]** to it.

Yae and I walked through the portal with Ieyahsu and a handful of his personal guards.

“Huh... I see, so this is Kyo...”

It was exactly how I expected it to look... It basically had the aesthetic of Kyoto in those old historical dramas my grandma used to watch. It was honestly weird as hell to see it in the flesh. I wondered if I'd see generic townspeople walking around, saying stock phrases right out of a period piece.

A large vermillion gate stood before us, and behind us stretched a massive road that led toward a five-tiered tower. Clearly we were on something similar to a Suzaku Avenue from ancient Japan.

The massive gate creaked open after Ieyahsu spoke with the stationed guard.

We were guided toward the main building by a man dressed in traditional, regal-looking garments. We removed our shoes and headed deeper into the shrine-like inner palace.

As we walked through, I noticed a few barriers being set in place here and there. They seemed to be defensive installations at key points, and were a mixture of defenses against physical and magical attacks.

We continued walking through the hallway until we reached the innermost room of the palace. There were two great big sliding doors blocking it off.

Our nobly-dressed guide opened up the doors to reveal a massive interior, with a raised platform in the middle. A silk curtain surrounded the seat atop the platform.

There was a presence behind the curtain, it was likely the mikado of Eashen.

Ieyahsu's guards were made to wait outside, and the sliding doors closed again. We walked toward the curtain before Ieyahsu stopped us a short distance from it.

“Your Opulence... This is the grand duke of Brunhild, Mochizuki Touya.” Ieyahsu sounded a lot stiffer all of a sudden as he bowed down. Yae followed suit, and both of their heads were rubbing against the floor before long. I wasn’t Eashenese, so I didn’t bother.

Even though Brunhild was small, I was still a head of state. I couldn’t afford to casually bow down to any other world leader that shows up. Or that was what I’d thought, at least... But I did end up succumbing to peer pressure and nodding my head forward. It was just a little, at least...

“Good day, fair Grand Duke. It is a blessing to lay eyes upon you.” The curtains were parted, as the person from behind it stepped forward.

The person was unmistakably a woman. She was clad in a white and peach multi-layered kimono, a junihitoe. She was a gorgeous girl, with skin paler than snow, and hair even whiter than her skin.

...Welp. Guess she’s more of an empress than an emperor, huh? Good thing mikado isn’t exactly gendered.

But there was something about her that stood out even more than her pale complexion. It was her bright crimson eyes and the two tiny horn nubs that protruded from her forehead.

She looked like a delicate female oni. That’s the term that immediately came to mind, at least. It was more likely that she was a horned demi-human rather than an oni, though.

“I am Shirahime. I have been acting as the mikado of this land for over two thousand years.”

“Ah... Pleasure to meet you, ma’am. I am Mochizuki Touya.”

Two thousand years? Does your species have a long lifespan like the queen of Elfrau? But... I’ve never heard of any horned beastmen or demonkin with lives that long... And I can’t quite place where I’ve

felt this presence before, but there's something familiar about her... Wait...

"Have you perhaps noticed already? I am not an ordinary demi-human. My lineage is unique. While my father was of the demonkin, my mother was a spirit."

Shirahime smiled gently. So that was what I was feeling. She exuded a similar aura to the spirits.

If a spirit incarnated in a human form, there'd be nothing preventing it from giving birth. But the process was still highly unusual, and even dangerous. In a worst case scenario, it could take up so much of the spirit's energy that they'd die.

Spirits couldn't die in the sense that mortals understood it, but the reincarnated spirit would still not be the same person as the one that vanished. I wondered if Shirahime's mother had still decided to give birth to her, even knowing all that.

"Please raise your head. Given your status over the spirit world, it should be I bowing to you, no? Please forgive me for being unable to do so right now. I must maintain my composure as mikado. I hope you understand."

"Ah... Please don't worry about that... Who did you hear that from, exactly?"

"I heard from one of the Ice Spirit's subordinates. The Ice Spirit is something akin to an aunt to me, so I learn much from her peers and offspring."

"If that's the case, who was your mother?"

"The Snow Spirit. She was a gentle and loving mother."

The Snow Spirit, huh? That definitely explains your features.

The Snow Spirit and the Ice Spirit were both on the same level, one level directly beneath the elemental pillar spirits. Having such a powerful spirit take mortal form was extraordinarily rare.

Apparently, just after Shirahime was born, her mother had found her powers waning, and eventually, she faded away.

"I have been meaning to thank you for some time, Grand Duke. For what you did in dealing with Hashiba Hideyooshi, I mean."

"You mean that monkey?"

"It is shameful for me to admit, but I could not physically or mentally refuse his whims. His ascension to the role of feudal lord was pushed through rather insistently on his part, as well."

That made sense. No matter his nature, he still had divinity inside him. Shirahime had the lineage of a spirit within her, and most spirits were naturally subservient to gods.

"Ieyahsu, when you handled the remainder of the situation so skillfully, I felt a weight lifted from my shoulders. I must extend my thanks to you as well."

"Y-Your praiseful words are wasted on me..." Ieyahsu muttered, his head still pressed against the floor.

Dude... You can lift it up now, I'm sure. "So, Grand Duke. Why have you made contact with me this day?"

"Ah, right. Well... you see..." I sat down and began discussing various issues with Shirahime.

She officially approved the idea to have Eashen join the League of Nations, and expressed interest in attending the next meeting herself. Given the fact that the next meeting was going to have a beach party at Egret attached to it, I feared her gaudy getup might be a bit of a problem...

Plus, the tropical heat could have had adverse effects on someone born from the Snow Spirit.

I reached into my pocket and took out two white mass-produced smartphones. I passed one to Shirahime, and one to Ieyahsu, then taught them the fundamentals.

Shirahime got used to the functions way faster than Ieyahsu did. She immediately started using the camera to take various shots of things in the palace and even took a few smiling selfies. She seemed to be happy with it.

“I wanted to ask you something, Mikado. Did your mother... Did the Snow Spirit ever appear before you again after vanishing?”

If it was when Shirahime was young, then it should’ve been a long time ago. That meant she should’ve revived by now.

“...You should know this, Grand Duke. When a spirit vanishes, it will revive itself as another. The Snow Spirit is no longer my mother, and I doubt they would react upon seeing me now.”

Though she smiled as she explained that, I couldn’t help but feel a twinge of sadness in her face. It was true that the Dark Spirit became someone else after I defeated it, and she lost her memories as well... But I didn’t think that meant everything was gone. I was sure that the Snow Spirit would feel some sense of faint kinship with Shirahime.

“...Would you like me to call her over?”

“To my mother...? Is such a thing even possible?”

“It is. There’s a high chance that she won’t remember you, you are correct... But I’m sure she’d be able to feel something.”
Shirahime hesitated and looked down at her own hands for some time. Then she nodded.

Typically I'd require some kind of medium, like fresh snow, to call on a spirit like her... But I had unique standing above all spirits, so I was sure I'd be able to manage without a catalyst.

I welled up a little divinity within me and called out to the Spirit Realm.

"In the name of your master, Mochizuki Touya... Fall unto the ground like fresh snow, spirit!" I spoke it in spirit tongue, so nobody else in the room knew what I'd said. But they didn't really care about that, they were more surprised by the sudden appearance of falling snow on the other side of the room.

The snow fell and gradually clumped together, forming a human shape.

Wait. Crap. I forgot that resurrected spirits can change personalities and even gender... Wh-What do I do if it's some burly old man? I don't wanna cause a traumatic memory for Shirahime if she sees her beloved mother as a musclebound beefcake...! I acted too rashly, oh geez...

After a small amount of time, the Snow Spirit manifested before me in the form of a beautiful woman. I sighed a breath of relief.

She had white hair and white skin, much like Shirahime. They looked like sisters, aside from the fact that one of them had red eyes and horns.

Hold on a second, that's a physical body, not a spiritual one. Is it made of snow? The Snow Spirit slowly opened her icy-blue eyes and looked around the room. And eventually, she stared right at Shirahime.

"M-Mother...?" The Snow Spirit smiled half-heartedly in Shirahime's direction. I looked up at the spirit and asked her a question.

"You don't remember, do you?"

“...I am afraid I do not. My memories are hazy, but my heart tells me that the girl there is indeed my child. A beautiful, and precious child... I am certain that I... love her.”

“Gh... M-Mother... Ah...” Shirahime broke down in tears and began to sob. The spirit responded by walking toward her and holding her in an embrace. The mikado of Eashen, who was now openly weeping like a little girl, brought her arms around the spirit’s back and tightly held her in return.

The spirit’s body was formed of snow, so it should’ve been freezing to the touch. Shirahime didn’t seem to mind that at all, however. Her weeping face was buried in her mother’s bosom. Given that she was the spirit’s daughter, it made reasonable sense to assume she had high resistance to the cold.

I looked next to me and found Yae struggling to hold back a wellspring of tears as she watched the touching reunion. ... *You got boogers leaking out of your nose, Yae.*

“Wah... Hic... Waaah... I-It is... beautiful, it is...”

“...Here, you dummy.” I took out a handkerchief and wiped Yae’s face. She was certainly moved easily, but I enjoyed that innocent maiden-like aspect of her personality. Yae’d probably get flustered or mad if I said that out loud, though.

“Waaah... Hic... Th-This is so amazing, Your Opulence... Hic... I-I am so happy...”

I turned around to find the source of that rough, weepy voice... And I saw Ieyahsu looking upward with tears flowing down his face. *You’re crying too?! I’m not wiping your face, old man!*

“...Mochizuki Touya, he who holds dominion over us spirits. Though you have called me here, could you forgive my rude request? I would like to forge a contract with this girl.”

“Sure. Sounds fine by me, go right ahead.”

I didn’t exactly summon her here to enter a contract with her, anyway. I didn’t need contracts to call spirits, so there’d be no point. I had a feeling the two of them would be much happier with this outcome.

“...I will always be with you, my daughter. If you suffer pain, or fear, or sadness... I will protect and support you, my love. My blessings are all upon you now, my dear little girl.”

“Mother...” The Snow Spirit faded away into particles of light and vanished. A small white stone was left in Shirahime’s palm.

I asked Shirahime to let me see the stone, then reached into **[Storage]** to pull out a mithril ingot. Then I used **[Modeling]** to shape it into a bracelet. After that, I embedded the stone into it. That would allow Shirahime to have the summoning stone on her person at all times.

Shirahime took the bracelet for me and gently cradled it for a moment.

“Words cannot describe the good you have done for me this day, Grand Duke. Let us make strides toward a peaceful future together, as leaders of this world.”

“Of course. I look forward to working alongside you.”

Shirahime extended her hand, and I took it in mine before giving it a shake. Perhaps it was due to her having been in her mother’s embrace, but her hand had a faint sense of cold to it. It was a gentle, soothing kind of cold.



It was time for the League of Nations to have their scheduled meeting. This time we’d be joined by the new arrivals from Egret, Eashen, Elfrau, Ryle, Hannock, and Palerius.

Well, it was less of a meeting and more of a party this time around. The focus would be fun rather than stuffy formalities.

Palerius had formally become a kingdom after opening itself up to the world. Mentor Central had officially changed her title to Queen Palerius, as well.

With this, every country in the world aside from the kingdoms of Nokia and Horn were members of the league. There was now a grand total of eighteen countries united.

Felsen and Xenoahs had looked into the possibility of Nokia and Horn joining us, but they didn't receive positive responses.

Apparently both nations were suffering internal conflicts and had no time to look outward, or something like that.

I didn't want to butt into their business, so I decided to keep an eye on them from afar for the time being.

I invited the new representatives into Brunhild's game room.

I handed smartphones to everyone who hadn't yet been given one and showed them how they worked. Everyone also was chatting and getting along as usual. Some were drinking tea together, while others were playing games.

Shirahime, Eashen's mikado, had already been given her smartphone. She decided to use this opportunity to teach the other newbies how it worked.

"Hm... This is rather interesting..." Carlo Ol Hannock, king of the Hannock Kingdom, dialed a number into his phone as he muttered.

I'd briefly met the man once during the Yulong incident, thanks to the emperor of Regulus. He was a glasses-wearing old man without many distinguishing features.

He honestly looked like the kind of guy you'd find in an office job. But despite his average looks, I'd heard he was a great ruler. It

was definitely true that if he had no talent, he wouldn't have been able to resist Yulong for so long. It just went to show that one shouldn't judge a book by its cover.

"Hoho, it can do a lot! More than a mere communications device... I'd like to record a few stage shows with this little thing."

The king of Ryle, Balstra Dverga Ryle, laughed merrily as he picked up the call from King Hannock. He was a short and stout man with a pot belly. Despite his dwarven blood, he'd proven to be quite a peace-loving man. Since Ryle was also home to most of the world's dwarven population, he acted as a representative of their species in the League of Nations, too. Even though he disliked drinking, and didn't much care for fighting, and should've been considered the opposite of dwarven values... He was actually quite a good spokesman for his people.

"Ooh, interesting! You can even take pictures of yourself?"

"Ah, Lady Shirahime, what does this button do?"

"Oh, this one makes it shoot out light if you try to take a picture in a dark place. You can change the setting manually, but I think it is best to leave it on the Auto mode."

Queen Palerius and Queen Elfrau were attentively listening to Mikado Shirahime's explanation of the camera functions.

The three of them started taking group selfies and giggling together. They were acting like high schoolers, despite the fact that two of them were well over a thousand years old...

"Our country's pretty far from shore, so I'm glad for this thing..." The king of Egret nodded quietly as he slid his finger along the touchscreen. The golden feather on his head bobbed along with his motion. I was in the middle of teaching him how to send a text. I'd initially assumed the guy to be a bull-headed warrior with no brains, but he was surprisingly dexterous and quick to learn.

After teaching him how to open and reply to texts, as well as send his own, I ended the lesson.

All the new members started walking around, exchanging phone numbers with the established league members. Then, they started mingling and chatting amongst themselves. The plan was to send everyone to the king of Egret's private beach after the orientation in Brunhild to have a party.

The private beach was about as wonderful as I expected. The sand was soft and the water was clear... There was also a pleasant little trail that led up toward a cliffside villa, one with a breathtaking view of the horizon. I'd taken time the day prior to make the place safe, including setting up a **[Prison]** around the area that blocked any harmful marine life from coming near. There were also precautions to prevent drowning, I had Sango and Kokuyou on duty as emergency lifeguards.

After all the royals, their families, and their private guardsmen arrived... It was looking less like a private beach and more like a public one. There were a few too many people for my liking...

"There are many royals here today, there are..."

"...Yeah, if something deadly went down here then the whole world would be screwed."

Yae and Elze chatted to each other, as I quietly hoped they weren't bringing bad omens. They'd changed into their swimsuits and looked nice as ever.

Most of the people there had changed out of their regular clothes and into more suitable beach attire. Those that didn't really enjoy the beach or couldn't handle the sun were lounging in the villa instead.

I was wearing a loose-fitting parka and a pair of swimming trunks. All the swimsuits worn by the people here were top-tier luxury articles created by none other than Zanak's clothing line.

There were a few children merrily running around the beach, playing with the beach balls, floats, and other toys I'd provided them. It was cute.

There was Mismede's Prince Remza, he was ten years old, along with his brother Prince Alba, who was seven. They were playing along with ten-year-old Princess Lilac of Hannock, and her sister, the eight-year-old Princess Milneah.

The king of Palouf, who was around ten, was splashing around in the water with his fiancée Rachael. She was the same age as him, if I recalled correctly. They looked to be having fun.

I looked over and saw the Prince of Refreese, a twelve-year-old named Redis, and the Princess of Mismede, eleven-year-old Thea. They were laughing as they rolled around together and play-fought. I could sense a budding kinship between them.

"Ah, first love, you know? It's as vibrant as the sun... you know?"

"...There you are..."

Karen was peeking out at them with a happy look on her face. With her pink bikini, she was already fully dressed for a vacation.

"...Just don't meddle with them, okay?"

"I won't, you know...? It's their first love, I won't do anything stupid... A situation like this is delicious enough as it is..."

Delicious? Just don't mess anything up, damn it... Well, whatever, I'll trust you this time...



I shrugged as Karen ran off toward Yumina and Sue. I was about to sit down on some of the lounge chairs, but I looked over and caught sight of a man laying face-down on the beach. He wasn't moving a muscle and looked completely dead.

"...What the hell are you doing, Overlord."

Is it heatstroke? I wondered quietly, but I was wrong. Spica, Sakura's dark elf guard, walked up to me and told me what had happened.

"Well... earlier, His Horribleness the Overlord, kept taking picture after picture of Lady Sakura in her swimsuit. But then she turned around and glared at him... And after that, she called him disgusting." According to Spica, the moment he heard her say that, he collapsed on the spot. This guy was never gonna stop being a moron, apparently.

To be honest, I could understand her irritation. Father or not, it's a little weird to take pictures of girls in their swimsuits.

"...I don't want him catching heatstroke, so could you drag him into the shade?"

"Certainly."

I didn't really think the overlord could get too damaged by the sun, but I didn't want to take any chances. Spica, along with her father Sirius, each took one of the overlord's legs and dragged him along the shore until they reached a shaded area.

"Touya..."

"Hm...? Linze, and... Oh, Princess Reliel?"

"It's been a while."

When my eyes fell upon the princess of Refreese, I subconsciously shifted into a defensive stance. In a sense, this

woman was a frightening enemy, after all. She wrote those dangerous romance books.

“You know Linze?”

“I have spoken to her through Yumina a few times. This girl is quite a fan of my work, after all.”

Princess Reliel lowered her voice as she spoke. Seemed like she didn’t want her father to find out about her job as an author.

If her books weren’t so... risque, then she wouldn’t need to keep it hidden, though.

“Um... Touya? I was wondering if... If you’d be able to give Lil, er... Reliel, a smartphone of her own...”

“Hm? What for?”

“For my writing, of course! The things I write are, well... risky, yeah? If I put it down on paper, a maid might find it, or someone might find an old draft and tell my father... But if I had one of these devices, I could carry my stories forever! Anywhere! I could write wherever I want! It’s the perfect writer’s aide!”

I almost fell from my chair as I shuffled backward from the overenthusiastic princess. *I-I see... I guess that makes sense...*

To be honest, I questioned whether or not it was okay to give her one. I felt like I needed to put my foot down and say no, lest she use another poor man as the basis for her terrifying erotica.

But, as I was faltering, Linze moved in for the kill.

“Touya! She actually pens plays as well! She’s in the middle of writing her next one right now! Please, can you help her? She’ll use the smartphone to help with those works, too.”

Oh, a play? That reminds me of the one I saw back in Belfast, about the heroic young man Toyya who saves Princess Yuina from a dragon... I think Reliel wrote that one too...

It was pretty obviously based on me and Yumina, but the plot was pretty original and wholesome as well. I enjoyed it.

I sighed before glancing toward Linze. *Man... How can I say no to a direct request, huh? There's nothing I can do...*

In fairness, Princess Reliel wasn't likely to misuse her phone. She might have had a few... quirks to her personality, but she was a good person at heart. After all, she was a friend of Yumina.

I reached into **[Storage]** and pulled out a mass-production smartphone. Then, I handed it to Reliel.

"Have Linze teach you how to use it... And please don't use it in a way that disturbs the general public order, alright? Please... think of common decency."

"...Why'd you have to emphasize it...? But fine, of course... Thank you. Oh, while we're at it, would you happen to have anything I could use for printing my text?"

...You sure like asking for a lot, don't you? But... I actually do have something like that. I was planning on handing it out to the other world leaders, but it's not like you can ask your dad to borrow it. He might get suspicious.

I opened up **[Storage]** again and pulled out a thin device that kind of resembled a notebook.

All you had to do was put a blank piece of paper between the two halves of the device, then place your smartphone on top of it. After that, you just had to press the print button and it would magically transfer the selected contents from the smartphone to the paper.

It was something I'd innovated on my own instead of asking Doc Babylon to help me, so it was limited... You could only do one sheet at a time.

"It's in the prototype stages, but it's usable. It should be enough for you, at least."

"Thank you so much! This is really great... I promise you I'll pay you back by giving you some of my new books!"

"That's really not necessary! Really!"

I definitely didn't want a weird gift like that from her.

Linze and Reliel then headed back toward the villa, presumably to get the basics of the smartphone's uses down.

"Hey there, Grand Duke. Having fun?"

"Sure am. Oho, what's that?"

The king of Egret showed up and sat down on the chair next to mine. He offered me a certain kind of food. It was dry, and kind of like a stick, but it let off a unique smell.

"That's the dried Tentacular, right?"

"You're right, it's finally done drying out. Try a bit!"

I put the tip of the tentacle into my mouth and bit down, the flavor spread out across my tongue, and I found the texture quite palatable. *Huh, this is pretty good... I guess it was a success after all.*

"It's pretty good! Thanks."

"Mhm. Goes well with booze, too. Hard to believe something this yummy came from those gross, slimy things..."

"I feel you, yeah... It actually goes especially nice with mayo."

I reached into **[Storage]** and took out a little dish of mayonnaise, then dipped the dried Tentacular into it. It tasted even better. Some kind of spicy condiment would probably be great, too...

The king of Egret, following after me, dipped his own tentacle into the mayo and chowed down.

“...Mmm! I like it a lot... Really makes me wanna chug some beer.”

He invited me to go drinking with him, but I politely declined due to my lack of interest in alcohol. I was a minor by Japanese standards, but people in this world were fine to drink booze as young as fourteen.

At some point, probably summoned by some psychic link to any and all nearby mentions of alcohol, the kings of Mismede and Felsen came over and started to drink with the king of Egret. It wasn't long before they got rowdy and started snacking through all the Tentacular sticks. I looked for an excuse and quickly made my way out of that situation. I didn't really like dealing with drunk people, and the fact that those three guys were naturally boisterous meatheads meant it'd be dangerous to stick around.

I looked out on to the beach and saw Moroha was sparring with Knight King Reinhard. Wooden weapons, of course. I couldn't help but wonder if something so intense was appropriate for a beach party...

I saw Karina catching fish with her speargun, and somehow I'd completely missed Suika getting mixed up in the warrior trio's drinking party. As for the source of the Hawaiian-esque music playing to the background of all of this? It didn't take much sleuthing to figure out who was performing.

I saw uncle Kousuke chopping up watermelon and handing out the slices. Brunhild's watermelons were extra ripe and sweet, but

given the fact that they were nurtured by the god of agriculture, that was kind of a given.

I was getting a little hungry, myself. Dried Tentacular was yummy, but it wasn't exactly filling. I wanted to have some real food.

I opened up **[Storage]** for the umpteenth time today and pulled out a BBQ set. I covered half the grill with a wire mesh and the other half with a metal hotplate. I had uncle Kousuke give me some veggies, and started grilling them along with some dragon meat.

Sue, Yae, and Lu, three of my fiancées who happened to enjoy food the most, were all drawn by the smell.

"Looks yummy..."

"It certainly does, it does..."

"They'll be done pretty soon, actually. Wanna help me cook, Lu?"

"Sure thing!"

Lu was a talented cook, so I asked her to start prepping the yakisoba while I focused on the grilling. I brushed some soy sauce over the corn-cobs and handed them over to Sue and Yae.

"Phew... Phew... Hot, they are!"

"Hot but sweet, yum!" The two of them started cramming grilled corn into their mouths with great vigor. I began adding more dragon meat to the grill, ensuring I was wasting no time or space. Then, I threw in some more veggies. Onions, bell peppers, and pumpkin. I had to make sure I was contributing to a balanced diet, after all.

"Hoho, this looks positively scrumptious!"

"Touya, my boy. Could we trouble you for some as well?"

"Coming right up!"

The smell had drifted further, attracting the king of Belfast, and the emperor of Refreese. Slowly, but surely, more people began surrounding my grill.

“Yakisoba’s ready!”

“I shall try some, Lucia! This looks incredible.”

“As will I!”

Lu’s father, the emperor of Regulus, ate some of the yakisoba. Then, his other daughter, Ellicia, quickly did the same.

I asked uncle Kousuke to take over the cooking while I tried some of her food too.

The black pepper she’d sprinkled over the noodles gave them that extra little bit of punch, and the ginger root she’d added really brought out the flavor. I was amazed that no matter how many times I ate Lu’s cooking, it just got better and better.

The king of Lihnea brought over a good haul of fish that he’d dredged up, and Lu continued to make dishes with the new ingredients. Without missing a beat, she was churning out meals like grilled onigiri, spare ribs with a honey glaze, grilled turban shell, grilled shrimp, okonomiyaki, and so on.

Each and every dish was tastier than the last. Kousuke stepped up and started making grilled tomatoes and cheese, as well as seared onions. They were yummy, too. The guy was adept at bringing out the natural juices.

Delicious smells mingled in the air as we brought the night to a close.

After I’d returned all our guests to their respective countries via **[Gate]**, I waved goodbye to our Egret hosts and took my family back home as well.

“Phew... I’m beat...”

“You’re the one who spent your day running around so much!”

“...Yeah, you got me there.” I grinned quietly as I slumped back against the couch. Elze had a point. I had a lot to attend to, so the day really took it out of me.

“...It’s bad manners to slouch, Touya.”

“Sorry... Just lemme do it a little.”

Hilde was telling me off, but I wanted her to let it slide just this once. I was so tired I felt like I could drift away to sleep where I was... I actually almost did, when...

“Sorry to intrude, especially when you’re so sleepy.”

“Whuh?! You scared me!”

I opened my drooping eyes to find Cesca, my annoying maid, with her face pressed up right against mine. *That’s way too close for comfort!* I scrambled due to the sudden confusion and ended up falling off the couch.

“My my, for you to wake up before I press my lips against yours for a delicate wake-up baiser? You’re quite a brute, mon cher...”

“Shut your trap! What is it?”

Don’t try to kiss me at all, you pervert!

“There are two people at the castle gates, master. They’re demanding an audience with you, and claim to have met you before.”

“Two people? Who?”

“I’m afraid they were wearing hoods and cloaks. I couldn’t make out their features, but they were both women.”

I had absolutely no idea who they could be, maybe they were female adventurers I’d met in the past or something.

“...Goodness, you filthy horndog. You must have impregnated them, right? They must be here for child support!”

“WHAT. STOP. NOBODY SAID ANYTHING ABOUT ANYONE BEING PREGNANT! HEY, PLEASE DON’T LISTEN TO CESCA. YOU GUYS KNOW SHE’S INSANE. I MEAN IT!”

My fiancées suddenly shot confused glares toward me, so I immediately tried to nip it in the bud. It sucked because I hadn’t even done anything wrong, I didn’t deserve looks like that!

“Do not worry, Touya-dono. We believe you, we do. After all... you do not have the courage to do something like that, you do not.”

“Indeed. You just happen to attract women to you, Touya...”

“It’s possible that they think they have a chance with you, you’ll just have to go send them on their way.”

...Attract women to me? What am I, a flower? A magnet? A goddamn angler fish?!

I decided to figure out who the two at the gate were, so I activated **[Teleport]** and jumped there right away.

Just as Cesca said, there were two female figures at the gate. They wore hooded robes.

One of them spotted me and walked a few steps forward.

“It has been some time, Tohya.”

“Hm...? Oh... You!”

Even though the light outside was dim, I immediately recognized the face hidden under the hood. I’d only seen her once before, but she was unmistakable.

“Lycee, right?”

“Indeed. I am seeking Endymion. Could you perhaps tell me where he is?”

It was her. One of the few creatures that stood at the apex of Phrase life. She was a Dominant Construct, but one that had sided with Ende.

From what Ende had told me, she'd split off from him in search of her sister, Ney.

But that meant...

I turned toward the other hooded figure who was still standing a little bit away from me. I narrowed my eyes as I saw the face of someone who had attacked me in the past. My body reflexively took a defensive posture.

Standing before me was Ney, the leader of the Phrase that had caused me trouble for so long.

I began speaking to her, careful to keep my wits about me in case this was a trap.

"...Ney, right? I'm surprised you actually came here."

"...You know my name? Did Endymion tell you?"

"He did. Melle mentioned you as well."

The moment she heard me say that name, she charged toward me and grabbed me by my collar. The guardsmen at the gate suddenly drew their weapons, but I raised a hand to tell them I was in control of the situation.

"Bastard! Why did you say that name?! Is she awake?! Has the Sovereign awakened?!"

"...[**Power Rise**]."

"G-Gauugh!"

I grabbed Ney's arm and twisted it until she let go of my coat, then I tossed her into the nearby moat. She sank right to the bottom

in an instant. Dominant Constructs had heavy bodies, and they weren't buoyant at all.

After a few moments, an enormous pillar of water erupted from the moat as Ney landed nearby. She'd jumped up right from the bottom.

"You wretch!"

"Ende and Melle are currently in my care. I will bring Lycee there, but I can't take you."

"Wh... What?!"

"Melle wants to talk to you, but she doesn't want you hurting anyone. If you're hostile toward me, in my territory, that means you're going against her wishes. That means you can't visit her."

"How dare you... How *dare* you!" Ney howled at me, fury blazing in her eyes. Crystal armor began forming all over her body as she entered her combat-oriented form. But she was suddenly stopped by Lycee stepping in front of me.

"Ney, calm yourself. If you act improperly here, then you may never see the Sovereign again. Don't you have something you need her to know?"

"That... That is true, but he..."

"He isn't the kind of person who would hurt the Sovereign, Ney. And you know... he killed Gila. Do you think you can win against him if he decides to make you his enemy?"

"I... I understand. You're correct, Lycee... I must meet with the Sovereign and calm myself. I'll listen to you for now..." Ney muttered to herself as she shed her combat armor. I was glad that Lycee had spoken sense into her. I was under the impression that Ney was the elder sister, but it looked like the opposite in this situation.

"So, what do we do from here?"

“I’m going to seal you two in a barrier much like the one Ende and the Sovereign are in, okay? I won’t be able to bring you to them otherwise.”

“Very well.”

Lycee nodded, while Ney simply ‘hmped’ and looked down at the ground. Getting their consent was easier than I thought, but Ney probably believed she could smash anything I created.

I cast **[Prison]**, imbued it with divinity, and projected it around them. I didn’t want them rampaging around Babylon, so this was an efficient way to keep them contained.

Ney immediately became suspicious of the barrier around them, while Lycee curiously knocked on one of the walls.

If Ney and Melle got along, it was possible to end any and all conflict against the regular Phrase... But any wrong step could mean all-out war, we had to navigate this carefully.

Still, while Ney was in my **[Prison]** she’d at least be contained and prevented from causing serious carnage.

If they were Dominant Constructs that were affected with the divinity of the wicked god, then they’d probably be able to break my **[Prison]**, though... Ende got out by using those sacred treasures.

I took out my smartphone to warn Ende and Melle in advance. Thankfully, I’d given them a phone earlier.

Because the two of them were effectively under house arrest, the least I could do was provide them with basic entertainment like books and games. Sometimes they even went to Cesca’s Garden to hang out together, and they were apparently there right now.

“Yep. Mhm. Lycee and Ney are with me. I’m gonna come up there now... Prepare yourself, you might get attacked or something.”

After finishing my conversation with Ende, I hung up on him. He was yelling something at the end but I ignored it... I had a feeling Melle would stop Ney if she actually tried something stupid.

“Alright, let’s go.”

The two of them nodded at me, and I warped us all up there with **[Teleport]**.

The garden and all its greenery looked especially pretty beneath the pale moonlight. Melle stood alone beneath a nearby tree.

Huh? Where’s Ende? Did he run away?

“Sovereign... M-Melle! Lady Melle, I... Augh!” Ney immediately dashed toward the Sovereign and... promptly bashed her forehead against the wall of the **[Prison]** she was sealed inside.

Oof... Hey, don’t give me that look. It wasn’t my fault.

Melle walked toward us with a worried look on her face. There was already a separate **[Prison]** around the Garden and the Ramparts, so I dispelled the smaller one around Lycee and Ney.

“Lady Melle...”

“Good evening, Ney. It’s nice to see you.” Ney’s voice was overflowing with emotion. She immediately dropped to her knee and kissed Melle’s outstretched hand.

“Lycee... You’re looking well.”

“...Indeed.”

Hm? Did Lycee just giggle a little? That’s pretty rare, since she’s usually so reserved.

“Touya. Thank you for bringing these two to me.”

“Don’t worry about it. I just want you to make your feelings clear here. I’d like the Phrase attacks on humanity to stop already.”

“...Now I know the Sovereign is safe and sound, there’s no reason to attack anyone anymore.”

“Well, that’s a relief. If you guys continued, I’d have had no choice but to commit mass genocide on your entire species... And that really would’ve been a pain.”

Ney glared at me when I said that, but I felt as if my comment was justified. She’d clearly stopped considering the vast amount of people who had been slaughtered through the actions of her people.

It was true that we’d fought back and killed plenty of Phrase, but striking back after being struck is a natural reflex. Nobody in the world would simply bow down and die if someone came after them.

I remember a quote that went along the lines of “The only ones who should kill, are those who are prepared to be killed,” and I believed in it whole-heartedly.

“...It’d be impossible for you to commit genocide against us at this point. Nearly all of our soldiers have been consumed by the gilded at this point...”

“The gilded? You mean those mutants?”

“Mutants...? A strange name, but certainly appropriate. Those traitors, Leto and Luto... They attacked us and forcibly converted the majority of our forces. We no longer have a method of opposing them. Those absorbed by them transform into the gilded, the mutants... They are no longer our kin, and they gleefully hunt us.” The wicked god’s cells seemed to act like a viral agent, forcibly converting anything it came into contact with into a new being.

It was kind of like seeing a virus spread in a zombie movie, with the infected never being able to return to normal. Honestly, it was a little ironic that their worst predators would rise from their own ranks.

“...Given that you systematically slaughtered entire worlds before reaching this one, I’d call it karmic justice. Wouldn’t you?”

“Tsk...” Ney had nothing to say to that. I was irritated by her lack of response, it made me seem like a bully.

If someone close to me had died because of the Phrase, I’d have taken this much further, but as it stood I had no personal grudge against their species. So long as they left this world and never came back, I’d be fine with it.

“...For now, all four of you need to talk this out.”

“Four of us?” Lycee tilted her head as she said that.

“Yes. You three, and the person hiding in that tree over there.”

“...Don’t reveal me like that, Touya!” Ende grumbled quietly as he hopped down from the treetop. I could see his scarf poking out from the branches.

The moment Ney set her sights on him, her eyes blazed with anger.

“Endymion!”

She suddenly stood up straight, cladding her hands in crystal gauntlets. She looked mad, which worried me.

Though, through Ney’s eyes, Ende was a man who had tricked someone precious to her and taken her off to another world.

“W-Wait a moment, Ney! You cannot lay a hand on Endymion!”

“B-But Lady Melle, I... My fury toward that man is...”

“C-C-Calm down, please! Melle’s telling you, right?”

“How dare you speak so casually of her!” Ney charged forward, but was physically restrained by Melle when she tried to swing a punch.

Quit messing around... I sighed and looked toward Lycee. She was just watching the scene without any sort of expression on her face.

I personally didn't care if Ende got hit or not, but it felt like things were at a standstill so long as this went unresolved.

"Hey, Ende. Just let her punch you once, then you guys can have a proper talk. Alright?"

"What the...? Hey! You'd think differently if it was your face on the line!"

"I'll heal you up, assuming she doesn't kill you instantly. Does that sound fine by you, Ney?"

"...I must admit it won't be enough to fully satisfy me, but I'll accept it for the time being."

"Just don't kill him, alright?"

"Obviously. I don't exactly feel great about letting this cur live, but Lady Melle would surely be sad if he died."

I felt a little sorry for Melle, since she seemed caught between the two parties, but this was the easiest way to wrap up the tension. They wouldn't be able to have a good discussion with all this hanging over them. Frankly, Ende probably needed a good smacking, but I kept that part to myself.

A few moments later, a dull impact rang out through Babylon's garden, and Ende sailed through the air in a perfect arc.

...Damn, that's a home run.

◇ ◇ ◇

"What happened next?"

"Not all that much, to be honest. Melle is trying to convince Ney to give up, but Ney still wants to bring Melle back to their

homeworld. It'll probably take a while for them to reach a consensus."

I held back a yawn as I answered Hilde's question. They spent the whole night talking, and ended up chatting in circles the whole time. It was like water circling the drain, over and over. The Phrase probably didn't require sleep... They only entered a dormant, hibernation-like state when low on magic or sunlight. Or that was what happened with the first Phrase we ever encountered, at least.

*If I block all magic from entering the **[Prison]** and suck out all the magic inside, would the three of them enter that dormant state? If I tried something like that, Ende would probably try to kill me... It was only a hypothetical situation, so I decided not to give it any further thought.*

I drove those intrusive thoughts out and sipped down my cup of tea in a desperate bid to fight off how tired I was.

It was late in the morning, and everyone had already left to attend to their daily duties. The only person sitting on the terrace with me was Hilde.



“Lestia has suffered at the hands of the Phrase as well... I suppose my feelings are mixed on this subject.”

I could understand why she felt that way. We were effectively attempting to become friends, or at least become neutral, with a party that had been desperately trying to kill us. The fact that our heads understood the benefits, while our hearts felt uneasy, was a very human problem to have.

“What are you still doing here anyway, Hilde?”

“Ah... I-I was just reading a book that Linze had given me, that’s all...”

“...A book from Linze?”

I remembered the incident yesterday involving the nefarious author princess, and suspiciously turned my eyes toward the book Hilde had set down on the table. I recognized the title of the book as a popular romantic story from Roadmare. I sighed a bit of relief, content in the knowledge she wasn’t reading anything... freaky.

“Is it good?”

“I’m finding it rather unique, as I’m not used to stories like it. Most of the novels I’ve read in the past are tales of adventure and heroism.”

Hilde seemed a little embarrassed as she spoke. It was understandable, given that she’d been raised in a knightly family, but I still questioned her father’s parenting skills...

“It’s a little embarrassing, but I always enjoyed the characters in those stories.”

“You mean the damsels in distress?”

“No, the knights that saved them.”

“Ah, I see.” Yep, the knight king’s child-rearing skills were very questionable.

“But I definitely understood how those damsels must have felt when they were saved... The first time we met, you appeared as if from nowhere to rescue me, Touya. As you slashed the Phrase to pieces, I had my eyes fixed on you...”

Oh right, totally forgot I first met her during that Phrase attack.

“After that, I started gathering as much information about you as I could... Even my brother found my actions queer. Your killing of the Black Dragon... Your quelling of the coup... Each tale of your dashing exploits made my heart grow fonder. It wasn’t long before I hoped we’d meet again.”

Man... That’s so embarrassing to hear... I guess Hilde being this direct is also because she’s so knightly... Her brother’s kinda like that too.

I decided to brush off my embarrassment by spouting a cheesy line.

“But you know... if the Phrase had never appeared in this world, we might have never met. That’s one thing we have to thank them for, eh?”

“I-I suppose so... Though it may be a little selfish...” Hilde said as she chuckled softly.

“But that’s why when I read romantic books like this, I can connect with the way the protagonist feels... Things like her loneliness when separated from the man she loves, or the frustration she feels when she can’t voice her emotions properly... or the happiness she feels when her dashing hero does something for her. That’s how I came to enjoy these works of romantic fiction.”

That made sense to me. It was a little embarrassing to hear her say those things about me, but I understood her perspective.

I wanted to do something to make her happy, so I opened my mouth.

“So... would you like to maybe go watch a romantic movie with me?”

“Oh! A motion picture?! It has been a while since I’ve seen one. I’d love to!”

Hilde clasped her hands together in joy. I watched movies with the girls now and then, but sometimes it was difficult because I had to explain concepts and technologies that were unique to Earth... It ended up eating a lot of time up. Due to that, we typically watched fantasy flicks, basic comedy movies, or simple action movies. Watching a romantic movie would definitely be a first.

I opened up the movie app I’d downloaded to my smartphone. God Almighty had given me a ton of virtual currency so I could download basically whatever I wanted without feeling guilty for pirating them... I also made sure to avoid certain adult films. *Hmm... Which would be good...*

I settled on a movie about an Englishman who owned a bookstore and ended up falling in love with a Hollywood actress. I’d seen a little bit of it on TV some years ago, but remembered it looked interesting enough.

We walked into the living room and I closed the curtains, then we snuggled up on the couch and settled in.

I pressed play, and the movie began. It was the Japanese-dubbed edition of the movie, but for some reason, the people of this world were capable of understanding it. Still, I was instantly able to speak the language of this world when I came here too, so I decided not to think about it and just assumed God Almighty did it.

As I thought about silly things, I could see Hilde getting engrossed in the movie. I decided to join her.

I got flustered and embarrassed during the more... intimate scenes of the movie, but Hilde seemed to really enjoy it. That made my heart warm. I was a lucky man.



Interlude II: I'm Happy Just To Dance With You

"My, my, my! What is this?! Could it really be?! This is incredible!"

"Is it really that impressive?" I had no frame of reference to go on, so I wasn't quite sure why Zanak was so impressed by the item I'd presented to him.

"Magnificent! This material is produced by moon silkworms, and they've been extinct for hundreds of years! This cloth is simply exquisite! Exquisite I say! This kind of material is sought after by royalty, you know! At the very least nobility! Where did you find this?"

"Uhh... A chest in the dungeon."

"Oho! Perhaps the chest you found it in was enchanted with preservation magic... It's in perfect condition, ooh! This is truly wonderful!"

Zanak seemed absolutely smitten with what I'd brought him.

I told him I'd discovered it in the dungeon, but that was a lie. It was actually something I'd found while messing around in Babylon's storehouse. The piece of fabric was from the Partheno civilization, back during Doctor Babylon's time. Even back then it was considered a valuable thing.

All of Babylon's treasures were ultimately mine to do with what I wished. They were originally the Doctor's, but she handwaved it all and said she didn't really care. Apparently she was fine living out her life as a gynoid and didn't really need extravagance.

Since I was free to do whatever I wanted with whatever I found, I decided to bring this material to Zanac and have him check it out.

“So, do you want me to do something with this material?”

“Yeah. I didn’t bring it here just to brag about it. I’ve got a party to attend up in the Kingdom of Palerius, anyway. So I figured I’d bring it to you to see if we could get outfits out of it.”

“Palerius? Oh, that island to the north?”

It seemed like the word had already spread to most of the world’s merchants, I wasn’t too surprised. The discovery of a new nation was huge news, especially from a business perspective.

“Yeah, me and the girls were invited there for a party.”

I turned and looked deeper into the store. I’d brought my fiancées to Fashion King Zanac, and all of them were eagerly browsing the costumes.

“I see... Then you want me to use this fabric to tailor dresses for the young ladies?”

“That’s right. Can you?”

Zanac grinned broadly at my words. He moved closer to me. A little too close for comfort...

“Ohoho! Of course, I’d be honored to work with a fabric like this. I swear on my honor as Fashion King Zanac, I’ll have my people feverishly create the best things they can!”

I was glad. If he’d appraised the fabric as cheap or mediocre, it wouldn’t have made good dresses for everyone, so I was glad to hear that not only was it good, but that he was willing to fill such a big custom order.

I didn’t want us to be seen out in public dressed in anything that looked cheap, our outfits needed to be appropriate for royalty.

Nothing would be worse than us being sighted at the party in something tacky, and then a rise in rumors of Brunhild not being financially well-off or something...

To be honest, I had a fair bit of money in my coffers anyway, so getting luxurious dresses made wasn't a big deal.

"Touya, is everything alright?"

"Ah, yeah. All is well. Seems like we'll get something nice."

I turned around at the sound of Yumina's voice, and I saw the other girls behind her.

"I'll take your measurements now, please follow me."

A female store attendant gestured toward the girls and took them to a fitting room. That reminded me, the girls had all been eating very little... I wondered if they were worried about their weight. I hoped they wouldn't deprive themselves of food all the way until the party started.

I decided to look up some lower calorie recipes and give them to Crea, since unhealthy eating habits could end up catastrophic.

"Oh, right... Here... It's the designs that each of the girls picked out for their dresses... Is this fine?"

I took out nine different sheets of paper and spread them out across a nearby table. Zanac picked them up and carefully looked over each.

"Hmhm... I've never seen designs this pretty before... They're truly lovely... Your eye for design is certainly versatile, Grand Duke."

"Ahaha..."

I couldn't tell him the truth, that the designs were just taken based on image search references I'd looked up online. They weren't actually my designs.

I swallowed my guilt and continued talking with Zanak about the dresses.



There were four major cities on Palerius island, one in each cardinal direction. In the days of Alerius Palerius, his four disciples reigned over a respective city each. The temple with the dimensional door was in the center of the island and had a path that forked off to each of the four cities. Now each of the cities was inhabited by the descendants of the people who were brought to the island's relative safety.

Since the island was safer now, more buildings were being constructed around the central temple. The ultimate goal was to turn it into a bustling capital city, with the temple serving as the new Kingdom's palace.

Since the capital didn't technically exist yet, the party was being held in Meridius, the southern capital.

Heads of state from around the world, along with their families, had been invited to celebrate there. Naturally, I was invited as well. Besides, I was the only one who could bring everyone to the island.

Each country had one or two mages that specialized in teleportation or transportation magic, but I was the only one who could precisely leap across nations and move people to exact locations from my memories.

The party was to formally coronate Mentor Central as the Queen of Palerius.

Palerius island didn't exactly have an aristocracy, but there were favored bloodlines. The descendants of the city founders would be designated as four lords under the new Queen. It was kind of similar to Eashen's structure.

Due to the fact that Palerius didn't really have anything much akin to nobility, the party wasn't that fancy either. It didn't feel gaudy or oppressive.

Personally, I liked that, it felt a little more casual in the same way that Brunhild did. Plus, I didn't want to participate in any dancing, so that was a relief too. There wasn't much in the way of music, either. There was a band playing, so some music rang through the halls as the festivities went on.

Hmm... A band... I don't think Brunhild needs one. As far as music goes, Sousuke is more than enough.

That did remind me, though. A few members of our knight order were interested in instruments, but they weren't exactly unified or anything. I decided it might be a good idea to get them some proper training, then they could end up being Brunhild's official band... Or maybe even an orchestra if there were enough.

"Grand Duke, thank you so much for all you've done."

Queen Palerius approached me and flashed an earnest smile. Djent, leader of the southern city, was behind her.

He stood stoic as ever, but I could see the traces of a grin on his face. It was good to see the people of Palerius looking happier than ever.

"No need to thank me. Rather, thank you for founding this nation properly. I wish you well, honestly. From one leader of a fledgling country to another."

I grasped Queen Palerius' outstretched hand. It was true we were both fledgling nations, but Palerius island had a history spanning five thousand years.

Queen Palerius smiled and went off to speak with the other royals.

The tables were lined with various meals. I'd never seen any of them before, but their taste matched how great they looked. I used my hands to rip off a portion of some meat and bone. It was delicious... Whatever it was, it reminded me of spare ribs.

I chowed down and noticed Sue walking toward a crowd. I followed her stride and found her settling near my other fiancées. They were surrounded by curious women. Apparently they'd all noticed the quality of the dresses they were wearing.

The royal and noble girls immediately started fawning over my fiancées and complimenting them on their looks. The compliments only increased once Yumina casually mentioned that the dresses were made of moon silkworm thread, and also dropped the fact that the material couldn't be obtained anymore.

While that was a true statement, there was actually a truckload of the stuff in Babylon's Storehouse. What they were doing might've amounted to gossip, but this kind of shallow interaction had its uses. It was important for the noble and royal ladies of each nation to talk, get along, and exchange information.

Either way, I had to abide by social norms. There was no way I was going to approach the girls while they were all in the middle of their chatter.

I shifted my gaze and found that Sue, Sakura, and Yae were side-eyeing me as I ate the ribs. It seemed like they wanted some, but it wouldn't be proper or ladylike to eat finger food in a dress that nice.

"Mmh... I'm tired..." Yumina eventually walked her way over toward me, free from the clutches of the other women.

I glanced to my left and found Sue sneaking some snacks into her mouth while nobody else was looking.

"Touya, you should help us out more... I don't wanna talk to stuffy ladies all night!"

“C’mon now... What do you expect me to do?” I definitely didn’t have the courage to approach that crowd. Making a single wrong turn meant risking the ire of noblewomen on an international level, and I wasn’t interested in that.

Leen walked over, her face just as tired as Yumina’s.

“Darling... We might want to change our cover story about where this fabric came from... As it stands, the ladies might have their husbands send knight squadrons into our dungeons.”

“Ah... That’s not good.”

Even if they scoured the whole place, they wouldn’t find any of the stuff. Maybe it’d be a good idea to slowly introduce the fabric into market circulation instead.

“It’s been a while since I’ve attended a party... But it is rather pleasant.”

“I understand that you must be accustomed to this, Hilde-dono... But I am of common birth and do not find it comfortable, I do not.”

Yae grumbled quietly next to Hilde, as her feet fidgeted around. Apparently she didn’t like wearing heels. I quietly cast **[Cure Heal]** on her and the others to offer their feet some relief.

“Thank you, Touya-dono...”

“Yeah, don’t overdo it. We can get you a change of shoes if it’s too much.”

“Not at all. If this is what it takes, then this is what it takes, it is.”

Yae put on a brave face, but I didn’t want her being uncomfortable. I stood back a bit and looked around the room. I didn’t really feel like talking to anyone I could see.

For noble families, parties like this were a good place to mingle and try to see about forming marriage-based alliances with other

important families. I had no interest in getting swept up in that kind of conversation.

In my case, I didn't have any wives, just an overabundance of fiancées. I definitely didn't need any more.

I really hope nobody tries to marry their daughters off to me. I decided to sit down and stop people-watching.

Hmm? Why's Queen Palerius rushing over here?

"Grand Duke, do you have a moment?"

"...Sure, what's wrong?"

"...Ah... It pains me to say it, but there are some people in this nation who opposed us opening up to the outside world. Some of them are causing trouble right now."

"What kind of trouble? An attack?"

It was one thing to peacefully protest for personal reasons, but kicking up a fuss was another matter entirely.

Then again, this party had various important families from around the world in attendance. It was a prime opportunity to damage international relations. I wasn't surprised they'd try to attack at an event like this.

"It's worse than we feared, actually... They're attempting to call Behemoths to Meridius." Djent spoke up, walking up to me from behind Queen Palerius.

Calling Behemoths here? Is that possible?

"They're using beastwood, I'd wager. It's a special kind of wood that releases a monster-attracting scent when it's burned. Something like that, right?"

"You're right, but it isn't beastwood. There's a special dried plant in this country called mystic herb. When burned, it has properties

much like beastwood. It calls to creatures in the wild and makes them lose what little reason they have.”

Queen Palerius promptly answered Leen’s inquiry. That definitely didn’t sound good.

“We used to use it as a hunting tool. When attacked by Behemoths outside the barrier, we’d burn it and leave it in a different location as a distraction.”

“And now they’re using them to attract Behemoths to the city. Meridius has a barrier around it, so nobody will be harmed... But the incident is sure to scare the royals and nobles we have as guests here. I’m certain public opinion of Palerius will decline if such an incident is allowed to happen...”

That was definitely true, and there wasn’t much worse than a bad international image. To have such a terrible event happen during the coronation ceremony? It’d be unthinkable embarrassing.

We’d hunted down most of the Behemoths on Palerius island some time ago, but obviously, we hadn’t killed all of them. There were still mana wellsprings here and there on the island, which meant new Behemoths would surface from time to time.

Even though the main barrier separating the island from the rest of the world was gone, the magical barriers protecting the temple and the four major cities were still in place. That meant they’d be safe so long as the Behemoths didn’t attack en masse.

“Search. Locate all Behemoths in the area.”

“...Searching. Search complete. Displaying.”

A map of the area surrounding Meridius was projected into the air. It was still far away, but there was a single red dot moving toward us. It was probably being drawn here by a group of hunters on the move. I wondered what to do. Kicking up a fuss would

definitely kill the party's vibe, so I decided it'd be better to handle it without letting the attendees find out.

"In that case, should we use Brunnhilde? It has stealth armor, so it should be able to fire a shot off completely unnoticed."

Yumina suddenly appeared by my side with a suggestion. That seemed fair. We could mute the sound of the gunshot with **[Silence]**, too.

I spoke to the queen about it and negotiated for the Behemoth's corpse as compensation. It'd be good to make back the money I'd spent getting those dresses tailored.

"Alright, we'll head off. Yumina and I'll go with Djent and some of the knights, since we need to figure out who's actually drawing the Behemoth in."

"Alright, then. Sounds good."

"As for the rest of you girls, please stay right here. We don't know their plan, so their friends might end up trying to disrupt the party directly. You gotta be here to take care of things if worse comes to worst."

"Leave it to us, Touya-dono."

Yae nodded firmly. They could easily draw their weapons from the **[Storage]** in their rings if need be, so I was sure they'd be able to handle themselves.

Yumina and I headed off out of the city with Djent and about a dozen knights.

"Brunnhilde!"

Once we made it out of the city, Yumina held up her left hand and called her Frame Gear through her engagement ring. It appeared in a flash, wielding its sniper rifle.

“Ooh!”

The knights were impressed as Yumina hopped into the cockpit and triggered the stealth functions of the machine.

Brunnhilde dissolved into the evening environment itself.

“**[Long Sense].**”

I projected my senses about a kilometer away from us, but the Behemoth wasn't in sight. I decided it must've been a little further, and pushed my sense of sight onward a bit. Eventually, I found it.

“Yumina. It's about five kilometers this way.”

“Got it. It's in my sights.” I saw an animal-drawn carriage with smoke rising from it, and a monster trailing behind. The Behemoth resembled a large and scruffy black goat.

“It's a Dark Goat.”

It was a creature with large, twisted horns. It wasn't an especially powerful monster, but any means, but that didn't mean it could be underestimated.

A Behemoth was a Behemoth in the end, it was still capable of catastrophic damage. Plus, this thing was over twenty meters tall. Our only saving grace was that it wasn't as agile as it could've been due to its sheer weight. If it was slightly more athletic, it would easily catch up to the cart leading it. It seemed like the people riding it were aware of that as well. They looked terrified.

I looked a little closer and noticed bits of animal guts under the Dark Goat's hooves. It was crushing other animals in its path. It seemed like the mystic herb was drawing other animals toward it as well, and the poor little things were dying immediately.

“I'm glad it's not a shelled monster like an Armored Turtle. Alright, I can't let it get any closer to the city or people will notice. I'm gonna take the shot.”

“[Silence]!”

All noise in the surrounding area vanished in an instant. I saw a puff of smoke and a flash of light from Yumina’s rifle, and then the Dark Goat toppled to the ground. *One shot, one kill. Great work.*

“...! ...! ...!”

“...! ...!” The knights were all cheering and jumping for joy, but they were completely inaudible due to the effects of my spell. I quickly canceled it.

I saw through my projected senses that the men in the carriage were surprised by the sudden downpour of giant goat blood.

“I’m gonna open a portal, so you guys can grab the morons.”

“We’re in your debt again.”

I figured it’d be better to have the guys captured here and now rather than let their nonsense carry on any further. I opened up a **[Gate]**, allowing the Palerius knights to charge in and surround the carriage. I passed through the portal after them and used Water magic to wash away the burning leaves.

“[Waterfall].”

“Bweh?!”

“Urgh!” The water came crashing down on the men’s heads. The smoke from the burning herbs vanished, and the men were washed out of their carriage as well.

“Apprehend them!”

On Djent’s command, the knights moved in. There wasn’t much in the way of resistance, and before long all the men were caught.

“Is that it, then?”

“For now.”

Yumina came through the portal behind me and tilted her head to the side. The situation wasn't over for the most part. They still needed to find out who was behind this stupid plan to begin with. But that was a problem for Palerius, not me.

I looked at the Dark Goat's corpse. It had been shot cleanly through the forehead. I was amazed by Yumina's precision, even at that distance... I didn't want the Dark Goat stinking the place up or rotting, or getting eaten, so I shoved the carcass into **[Storage]**.

We took the captive men back to Meridius. After parting ways with Djent, Yumina and I returned to the party.

"Welcome back."

"Everything fine now?" Linze and Elze noticed our return and called out to us. Queen Palerius also cast us a curious glance. I shot the queen a thumbs-up and a grin, letting her know everything had gone smoothly.

"Thank you so much... We must repay you for this..."

"Nah, it's fine. I got the Behemoth's body. That's all I need."

I hadn't really even done anything this time. It was all Yumina.

"Any problems here?"

"None to report. The teriyaki chicken was great..."

That's not really what I meant, Sakura... But I guess I'm glad you like the food.

"...Wait a second... Why does it look like there's a dance starting?"

Half of the dining space had been cleared away, and there were men and women dancing in pairs. The band was playing a gentle waltz, causing the partners to sway and dance in tandem.

Wait a second... On the piano, is that... Sousuke? When did you get here?! "Ghh... Why is there a dance?!"

"There wasn't one planned, but it seemed some thought the party was lacking without a dance. Thus, it happened..."

"And then Sousuke appeared out of nowhere and started playing music?"

Lu nodded. This felt unnecessarily convenient.

He was currently playing Flower Waltz from The Nutcracker. I stared at the band, wondering how they knew to play something like this. Leen, apparently reading my mind, spoke up.

"Those aren't Palerius natives, darling. They're from Brunhild. It's the group that was interested in taking up instruments. Sousuke has been working with them for a while."

"...Huh."

There were a lot of instruments lying around the knight barracks. I'd heard that some knights had taken an interest, but I didn't realize Sousuke had already taken them under his wing. He must've pulled them over here using his teleportation magic.

"Ohh... Father and Mother..."

"Hm?" I followed Yumina's gaze and saw the king of Belfast slowly dancing with his wife. Their movements were deliberate and mesmerizing. *Wow... Although, I guess that kind of thing's standard with royals. They look great... I have a lot to learn.*

"...I refuse to lose."

"What?"

Yumina grabbed me by the hand and began walking us toward the dance floor. *Whoa, easy there!*

"Hold on, Yumina! I can't dance..."

Since I became a royal, I'd understood that attending social functions was necessary. That's why I'd taken a few dance lessons. But unfortunately, it became clear I had no talent for it.

I knew some basic moves, but I was a little clumsy. Frankly, I just found the whole thing difficult.

"You can do the basics, right? Don't worry. I'll guide you, and it'll just be for one song."

"A-And then one with me, after!"

"Then I will dance with you after Lu!"

"You crafty little... I'll dance after Hilde, then!"

Yumina's words caused quite the stir with my other fiancées. Lu, Hilde, and Sue immediately spoke their desires.

"I would be better off just watching, I would."

"Uhhm... I'll pass."

"Me too..."

"I'm not much of a dancer."

"I prefer singing to dancing..."

Yae, Elze, Linze, Leen, and Sakura all declined the opportunity to dance with me.

It seemed like they were split into two camps. Those that wanted to dance, and those that did not want to. But I suspected that the girls who declined simply couldn't dance all that well. But that wasn't my place to judge. I definitely wasn't any good at dancing. Ultimately, my protests proved fruitless, and Yumina dragged me off.

Uhh, let's see here... Elbows straight... Shoulders lowered... Spine upright... Oh, hold on... Gotta put my hand on her shoulders, no wait... Her waist?

“Touya.”

Yumina smiled at me as I frantically wracked my brain.

“It’s okay. Just calm down and follow my lead.”

“O-Okay.”

I took a deep breath and squeezed Yumina’s hand. Then, I moved to the slow beat of the music, and we began to dance just like the other couples.

“Hmm... This song...”

“Something wrong?”

“...No, it’s okay.”

As we danced, I narrowed my eyes toward Sousuke. I wondered if he’d chosen this song on purpose. It was *Je te veux*, by Erik Satie. It was originally composed for a French actress, and the title translated to “I want you.”

The lyrics that were created for the piece were layered with thick, almost erotic intent.

“...Hmm...” I wondered why Sousuke had chosen this song, but I couldn’t dwell on it. I needed to focus.

Yumina slowed our dance and flashed me a gentle smile.

“It’s okay just to take it easy, you know. You don’t have to be so tense. Let’s enjoy our dance, and take it as slow as we need. There’d be no point wasting a good opportunity like this.”

...She’s having fun... Even though I’m not great at this, she seems to be happy... I looked around, and all the couples around us were dancing happily as well. It was nice.

“...You knew I was tense, huh? Was I holding you too tight? I’m supposed to be a royal, so I guess I was nervous about giving off a good impression. But you’re right. I shouldn’t worry about that, I should just be myself.”

Yumina always had a knack for pointing out things I hadn’t noticed. She also had a knack for giving me personal courage.

My legs began to move in a proper rhythm as the song went on, and an earnest smile crept across my face as I gave into the music with Yumina.

The dance was starting to feel really pleasant. I was happy just to dance with her.



Eventually, the song came to an end, and we stopped our dance as well.

“That was fun!”

“It really was. You’re amazing, Yumina.” Yumina smiled once more, and I ran a hand through her hair. Lu suddenly approached from behind us.

“Yumina, it’s my turn now. Shall we, Touya?”

Oh, right. I have three more dances to go... Well, no point worrying about it. I’m gonna have fun.

Yumina waved us off on to the dance floor and joined the other girls.

Sousuke started up another song. This time it was The Skater’s Waltz by Waldteufel.

I took Lu’s hand into mine and began an elegant synchronized motion with her.

I guess dancing isn’t so bad, huh? I smiled softly as I continued to dance the night away.

Chapter III: A Happy Twist Of Fate

“Oh, it connected! Amazing! There’s barely any lag at all!”

“Naturally, it was all thanks to my hard work of course. Linking up the Dimensional Disruptor proved more tricky than I’d initially expected, but it seems to be working well.”

I could hear Doc Babylon’s voice through my smartphone’s speaker. Even through a voice-only call, she was exuding raw, smug energy.

I was standing on one of the peaks of Drakliff Island in the Reverse World, while she was working in Babylon in the regular world. We’d successfully achieved cross-world instant communication, which was a pretty impressive feat in its own right. I could understand why she’d be smug, even if I couldn’t see her making the expression I imagined.

This technological leap meant we could now act quickly if the mutants appeared in the Reverse World.

Part of me wished that the Reverse World had an adventurer’s guild, though... It’d make things a lot easier. What I needed was an organization that specialized in collecting and distributing information... I wondered if maybe there was some kind of ninja clan hanging around, like Tsubaki’s people back in Brunhild.

Est from the Red Cats would probably know something like that, since they were an underground organization.

I was planning on giving mass-produced smartphones to her and Nia, so I’d ask them when we crossed paths.

“I’ll be off for a while, then.”

“Best of luck.”

“Ping.”

“Pong.”

“Pang.”

Shirogane bowed, causing the three maid Golems behind him to bow as well. The three of them were definitely growing more human-like in their motions. I was pretty impressed by their learning capabilities.

Now, Nia and the others...

I pulled up my smartphone and looked them up. *Hm? They aren't at the abandoned fortress, and they're not at the underground hideout either... Did they get a new base?*

The place was a little north of the abandoned fortress we'd encountered last time, within the Kingdom of Strain.

I used **[Gate]** to move to the old fort's courtyard. I could've used **[Teleport]** but I didn't exactly want to chance a repeat of the incident I went through with Nia last time... I didn't think it was likely to happen again, but I just didn't want to tempt fate.

I walked through the portal and out the other side.

“Wuh?!”

A young man, perhaps a bit older than me, jumped up in shock and drew his weapon. The red bandana on his head told me that he was a member of the Red Cats.

“Wh-Wh-What are you doing here?! Who are you?!”

He didn't seem to have any idea who I was, and he looked scared out of his wits.

“I'm Mochizuki Touya. I'm just stopping by here on my way to see Nia. I don't mean any harm.”

“Y-You know the boss?”

“Yeah, I guess. Is Est around, maybe? What about Euni or Euri?”
The bandana-clad man immediately turned around and ran into a building, then came out with a ponytail-wearing girl. It was Euni.

“Yo, long time no—”

“Touya! You came just at the right time! We need your help!”
Euni suddenly cut off my greeting and began pleading instead. I wondered what had happened.

“Boss and Est are in the middle of a fight! You gotta help them!”

“Wait, what?!” *They’re in a fight? Did the kingdom’s knights attack them or something?*

“They’re to the north, in Ripto village! Those golden devil things appeared! There’s a ton of them! Boss is fighting there, alongside the prince of Panaches... Even though they have two crowns, there are way too many monsters for them to handle!”

What?! The mutants? And a lot of them? Shit, this ain’t good... I took out my smartphone and projected a map of the area, centering it on Ripto village. Then I ran a search for the mutated Phrase.

Thud, thud, thud. Pinpoints landed all over the map. There were roughly a hundred of them. Frankly, I was relieved, I was expecting thousands of them... But that didn’t exactly mean I could relax either.

“Two crowns should be enough to handle that many, right?” I remembered reading in the newspaper that the prince of Panaches had taken out a group of mutants with his crown, so I wasn’t worried about it all that much.

“Boss and the prince have crowns that aren’t really great against groups of enemies! Plus, if she’s fighting to protect the people, she won’t be able to go all-out with Rouge either!”

I remembered Rouge's power. It was the red crown that served Nia. It had monstrously destructive capabilities and could control flames. It asked for its master to shed their blood in payment.

That definitely wasn't a power made for fighting multiple enemies. Plus, the more enemies, the more blood she'd have to spill. In the worst case scenario, the blood loss could even kill her.

Nia couldn't fight at full power because she'd put her own life at risk, and she couldn't go too powerful or she'd put all the people at risk. It was a truly terrible dilemma.

"Alright. I'll head over."

"Thanks so much!"

A single use of **[Teleport]** would easily cover that kind of distance. I quickly nodded to Euni before warping off to the battlefield.

I landed at a good vantage point, a hill overlooking the town. The sight I gazed upon was one of black smoke and ruined buildings. I saw a group of a hundred mutants laying waste to the town. Most of them were Lesser Constructs, but there were a few Intermediate ones dotted around too.

Using a Frame Gear for head-on combat would be ill-advised, since it'd only cause more damage. That was why I went with something else.

"Reginleif!" I invoked **[Storage]** and summoned my Frame Gear.

I jumped right into the cockpit and set my smartphone down on the main console. I then made Reginleif fly into the sky and activated the Fragarach systems.

The plated wings on Reginleif's back detached and began orbiting the Frame Gear.

"Mode Change: Dagger!"

“Fragarachs shifting to Dagger Mode.”

Each of the board-shaped Fragarachs split into four smaller segments. In the blink of an eye, twelve orbital devices became forty-eight blades.

“Gladius!”

The swords glimmered on my command. All forty-eight daggers started dancing through the air, piercing through the mutated Phrase below.

I didn’t know exactly where their cores were, so I just had the projectiles pierce them in multiple points at once. I also made sure not to cause any damage.

It only took a short amount of time for all the Lesser Constructs to crumble under my assault. There were only Intermediate Constructs left.

Suddenly, one of the remaining mutants, one shaped like a monstrous centipede, shot a particle beam cannon blast in my direction.

I tried to maneuver Reginleif to dodge it, but something suddenly jumped up in front of me. It was a small, blue humanoid Golem.

It looks similar to Nia’s Rouge... Is this the blue crown, then? Not that I really needed saving... But still. The thought counts.

It held its arm up against the incoming beam of light and bent the light back. The blast was deflected into the sky at an angle. *Huh. What was that?*

It was kind of similar to my **[Reflection]** spell... At least it looked that way at a glance. I wondered if that was what the Golem’s skill was. *Guess it... Saved me? I guess.*

I willed several of the crystal daggers to pierce the centipede mutant, and after a few slices, its body began to melt into gross goop. *Three left.*

“Mode Change: Blade.”

The daggers began forming into several longswords until there were twelve of them in total. I launched four of the blades against each of the remaining mutants.

A sound of screeching metal rang out into the air as the mutants were run through and disposed of in no time at all. Black smoke began to rise from their bodies, and they melted into goo.

That was that.

I used my camera to survey the town, and found it was mostly in ruins. Unfortunate, but there was nothing I could have done.

I quickly spotted Nia and Est. They seemed fine, as did Rouge and Akagane.

I set down Reginleif in front of them, then hopped out of the cockpit.

“Touya?! That was you?!”

“Sure was. I went to the fortress to find you, and Euni told me to assist. Glad to see you guys aren’t any worse for wear.”

“What... Forget about that a sec... Where’d that massive Gollem come from?!”

“It isn’t a Gollem. It’s a Frame Gear, and... Uh, forget it. I’ll explain later.”

I needed to sort out the roaring fires around the town before carrying on the conversation.

“Man, what a pain... **Descend, O Water. Blessing of the Heavens: [Heavenly Rain]!**”

Raindrops kept falling on my head, and then they kept falling everywhere else as the clouds spread out from above me. I quickly moved under a nearby building, and the light drizzle turned into a heavy downpour. After a short amount of time, the clouds vanished, and the sky looked as though there'd never been any there to begin with.

"That should take care of the fires."

"Amazing... You really can do anything, can't you?"

"You're like the sorcerers of legend..."

Est and Nia looked up at the sky in bewilderment.

[Heavenly Rain] was an ancient spell that allowed you to determine radius and amount of rainfall based on your own magic power. According to Leen, most people would only be capable of casting it over an area the size of a small dining room.

That meant the spell would be useless to most people, but it wasn't to me. Either way, it probably became a lost art because of its lack of functionality, it was just pointless as a spell.

If you needed a bit of water, then casting **[Water Ball]** would be more than enough. But I definitely found it handy for emergencies, and also crop watering.

"Wait, forget the magic. Tell me about that Golem!"

"It's not a Golem..."

Nia started yelling, and Est simply looked on at Reginleif with curious eyes. Rouge and Akagane also seemed inquisitive.

I wondered how to best explain the situation to them. I didn't exactly want to lie to them, but it'd probably take a while to explain. We needed to go back to the fortress if they wanted the full story.

“Truly magnificent!” A loud voice suddenly called out from behind us. I turned around and the sight I saw was enough to turn my expression into a deep, troubled frown.

The man in front of me was the absolute visual embodiment of the word “prince.” He had short golden hair in a bob cut, with a little crown sitting atop his head. He wore a small, blue cape on his back. His legs were adorned with white tights, and he had puffy striped pumpkin pants.

If he was a cute little boy then the look would be novel, and adorable... But he wasn’t. He was clearly around my age... so it looked weird, and forced. I didn’t know what to make of him at all. He looked just like he’d leaped out of a storybook.

He was likely the prince from Panaches. The small blue Golem that used the reflection-based technique was standing next to him.

“Truly, truly, truly magnificent! Such strength, such poise! My body quivers in anticipation!”

The pompous, exaggerated prince began lavishing praise upon Reginleif. He was certainly... hyperactive.

“...Who is this?”

“That’s the prince of Panaches. Robert Tell Panaches. He’s also the contractor of the blue crown, Distortion Blau.”

“He’s a dumbass prince. Nothing more.”

Nia grumbled quietly, following up Est’s more formal answer. I could sort of understand what she meant. He didn’t exactly look normal.

“You there! Are you perhaps this beautiful Golem’s master?”

“Not exactly? I mean, it is mine...”

The prince took his gaze away from Reginleif and began quickly stepping in my direction. He grinned broadly and moved using his whole body as if he was trying to dramatically assert dominance. He reminded me of an overenthusiastic actor.

“I see! Most curious! Then you have my thanks, my most astute and honest thanks! I’ve no idea what might have happened if you hadn’t arrived! Could I please hear your name, my friend?!”

“U-Uhh... It’s M-Mochizuki Touya...”

“Mochizuki Touya, you say?! Has a nice ring to it! I am the crown prince of the Panaches Kingdom! Robert Tell Panaches! But please, we are friends now, so just call me Robert! Ever since I was a child I have had very few friends, you see! I’d appreciate it if you completely ignored my magnificent, royal, gilded blood! Please ignore the silver spoon in my mouth! It isn’t important! My brilliant lineage is simply unimportant!”

Robert took both of his hands and tightly grasped one of my own, shaking it like an excited child. His eyes practically had stars in them... I was a little annoyed.

He didn’t seem like a bad guy. He was just too... eager? He was way too fired up about everything, so I wasn’t too surprised to hear he didn’t have many friends. I definitely couldn’t understand his weird fashion sense, either.

“Hey, idiot. Let go of my friend’s hand.”

“Why, he’s my friend too! Is there a problem?”

“Yeah there’s a problem, it’s you! I don’t wanna know anything about you!”

“Now now, Nia Belmont! Don’t limit your friendships! I’d like it if we could get along better, too!”

“Don’t be gross, asshole! I don’t wanna hear it, dumbass prince!”

“Goodness me... The red crown’s master is certainly a shy one, isn’t she?”

Nia glared at him like he was a piece of crap she’d just stepped in, and he was innocently smiling back at her. I had no idea what was going on here at all. I left their argument... If you could even call it that, and talked to Est.

“He’s certainly a character, huh?”

“That’s one way to put it. Regardless, he’ll shut down soon.”

“Shut down?”

As if to answer my question, Robert suddenly stopped speaking. His eyes immediately closed, and he faceplanted into the ground as if he’d just had his batteries removed.

Wh-What the hell?! Did Nia get a surprise hit in while I wasn’t looking? I got closer to check what was going on, and... I heard him snoring. The mad lad had straight-up fallen asleep.

“That’s the price the blue crown claims. The blue crown controls spatial distortion. Much like how Nia must offer up her blood, the contractor of Blau needs to offer up his own consciousness. He’s forced to sleep.”

Spatial distortion? Guess that explains how it bent away the beam. Still, that’s quite the compensation... Sleeping doesn’t actually seem all that bad, though.

“The blue crown can bend space and teleport much like you can. I’m not sure if I’m convinced of its uses, though... The contractor always falls unconscious within an hour of activating Blau’s power.”

“How long is he gonna be asleep for?”

“Depends on how many times he used the powers. If I had to make an estimate, he’ll probably be out for two days this time around.”

Two whole days? That definitely sucks. I’m not even sure if it’s worth the trade-off... Hell, if he falls asleep in the middle of a fight he could die. I wonder if he’ll fall into an eternal slumber if he uses it too much... Guess that’d make him more of a Sleeping Handsome rather than a Sleeping Beauty.

Wait, what do we even do with him? As I pondered to myself, the small Golem by his side picked him up and hoisted him over his shoulder. Seemed like it would carry the prince home.

“Prince!”

“Master Robert!”

Two knightly-looking people came running toward us from the town. One was a man, and one was a woman. According to Nia, they were his escorts and were never seen away from him.

It made sense that he’d have people with him, since he fell asleep at random based on his power usage.

The blue crown, Distortion Blau, turned away from us and began walking toward them with the prince in tow.

“Hmm... So that’s red, purple, and now blue... Are there no ordinary crown contractors, I wonder...”

“Did you say something?”

“No, nothing at all.” I was lucky Nia hadn’t heard my muttering. She probably wouldn’t have liked me musing about her being abnormal. I needed to take care of what I said out in the open, lest I invite danger.

Nia and Est were technically bandits, so they couldn't hang around for too long. I called Reginleif back into **[Storage]**, and then fired up a **[Gate]** to bring us back to the abandoned ruin.

◇ ◇ ◇

"To be honest, I have trouble believing this... But believing it would answer a lot of questions."

"Huh... I thought you were strange to begin with, Touya... But this whole tale makes you even stranger."

"Gimme a break."

I was in the fortress hideout with the Red Cat leaders. Currently, we were seated in a tent within the main courtyard.

I told them the whole story. About how I was from another world, about how I was royalty, and about how the mutated Phrase had appeared in the other world as well. I told them about my intentions to take care of the threat.

All four of them were here. Nia, Est, Euni, and Euri. They all had equally confused expressions as they sat around the table.

"So... Those metal devils... Or rather, these mutants... They're going to keep on appearing?"

"I'm afraid so, yes. In my world, we have a league of nations that keeps the whole world in the loop, but there aren't any similar countermeasures here. That's kind of what I'm hoping to fix... We were lucky there weren't a lot of them. But if a large group appeared, they could take out a whole nation."

"Th-This wasn't a large group? How many is, then?"

"They could appear in the tens of thousands. In the end, no country will be able to stand up to them all... Not even the ones in my world could do it alone, which is why we're working together."

When faced with an extra-terrestrial threat, the entire world really has no choice but to start working together as one. Otherwise, there wouldn't be a world left to rule over.

I didn't think getting nations in the Reverse World to co-operate would be much of a cakewalk, either. There was that whole Primula issue earlier, too.

"Wh... Hold on a second here... Tens of thousands? There's no way we could face off against them!"

"Nia, Est... You remember that Frame Gear thing I showed you earlier? They were originally designed to combat the Phrase, the species that these mutants derived from. We have hundreds of them standing at the ready."

"Hundreds of that thing...?!"

That wasn't strictly true. It wasn't like I had hundreds of Reginleifs in reserve. I couldn't show them the other models, since I didn't have any on standby in **[Storage]**.

"So, what's your next step?"

"I want to gain an audience with any person or organization that can help me gather information on this side. I already have ties in Primula and Triharan, but that's not nearly enough to cover the whole world."

"Would other countries even believe you? Even if they hear you out, they'll probably just laugh when you say you're from another world..."

Euri was right. Primula believing me was due to extremely specific circumstances. But even if they didn't believe me at first, they'd have to eventually. When the mutants attack their towns and slaughter their people, they'd have no choice but to believe.

I didn't want it to come to that, though... I wanted to co-operate with nations before they were brought to the brink of collapse.

"Hmm... Well, I do know of an information brokerage..."

Oho, great. I knew I could count on Est... Wonder who the broker is.

"Alright? What place? Do I know it?"

"It's Papillon."

"Wait... Papillon? Don't they run the black market?"

That was the place I'd gotten the three Etoiles. If I recalled correctly, the criminal organization that managed the black market was known as Papillon. Nia had said it was a vile organization that did anything in the pursuit of cash.

"Papillon is actually in the middle of an inner conflict right now. After the attack by the purple crown, they sent out several assassins and failed multiple attempts on the contractor's life. In retaliation, the purple crown and its master killed all the leaders of the organization."

Fanatic Viola, I think it was called... And its master was that psycho chick, Luna.

Wherever they went, carnage followed. I had no interest in seeing them again.

"Papillon split into two groups as a result. There's a group that operates above ground, and one that operates underground."

Est explained that the above-ground group managed inns and brothels as its main source of income while offering shady spy services like information gathering and rumor manipulation under the table.

The underground group, on the other hand, was dealing with more dangerous jobs like assassination, thievery, arson, and trafficking. The black market fell under their jurisdiction.

The leader in charge of the above-ground branch and the leader in charge of the underground branch had been openly arguing ever since the overall bosses were killed. Tensions were apparently reaching a fever pitch.

"The previous leader had no heirs, so the successor is expected to be one of the two sub-leaders... Right now they're engaged in a bitter feud about who should take over."

"Huh, I see. So I should go after the above-ground leader."

"Right. They're masters of information gathering. Papillon's inns are spread out all over the world, and they have a presence in every major city."

That sounded good to me. A network that wide would probably rival the adventurer's guild.

"...Wait, Est. The leader of Papillon's above-ground department..."

"Indeed... She's Silhouette Lily... Also known as Kageyuri."

"N-No way! We can't send Touya into her clutches! The poor guy'll be sucked dry!"

Nia began flailing her arms as her cheeks turned red. I wondered what she was getting worried about. It was just a lady, right?

"Is she scary, or something?"

"...Yes. Kageyuri is primarily in charge of Papillon's brothels, and she's a notorious woman... She's rumored to be undefeated in terms of seduction, causing man after man to fall... I've met her once before, and she's truly what I'd define as a man-eater..."

Hmm... A brothel master? Well, it can't be that bad. It's a little ominous, but it should be fine.

"Kageyuri isn't exactly adept in terms of fighting power compared to the underground boss, but she makes up for that in sheer number of subordinates. If you can get her on your side, she'll be invaluable."

"So, how do I meet her?"

"We'll use our connections to find out where Kageyuri is right now. After that... Well, you can just go and meet her, I suppose."

Is it that simple? Something feels weird here. I don't exactly want to get into trouble...

Little did I know that trouble was quickly becoming a lifestyle for me.



I found myself to the north of the Kingdom of Strain, in the commerce-based city of Cantere.

I headed straight for the red-light district and found myself at the highest-rated brothel in town. It was a gaudy-looking place called the Moon Parlor. It was lit up like a grand pavilion. There were bits of neon decor here and there, too, glowing in all kinds of different colors. I hadn't exactly come here as a customer, but there was still a nervous lump in my throat.

"...I bet this place ain't cheap..."

I wondered how much it'd even be for a night. Maybe a platinum coin? It's not like I couldn't afford it... But I wasn't here as a customer... I definitely wasn't here as a customer. There were some stairs leading up to the main entrance, with two burly guys in suits standing at the bottom. I was seriously intimidated just being near them.

Still, nothing would come of anything if I just stood still, so I moved onward. I didn't want to loiter around, that'd just look shady.

I braced myself for the glare of the bouncers and started ascending the stairs. I opened the door and found myself in a long hallway lined with stained glass windows. At the end of the hallway was a man at a desk. He wore all black and had a bit of a slimy smile.

"Welcome to the Moon Parlor, friend. Is this your first time?"

The man had a short beard and looked to be around thirty. His smile seemed painfully sweet. No matter how you looked at it, his smile was a businessman's. I was bad at dealing with guys like him.

"I'm a first-timer, but I'm not here for pleasure. I'm here to see Silhouette Lily."

"...If you're not seeking pleasure, friend... Then leave. Before you find pain."

The smile was wiped clean from his face, and he stabbed me with a sudden threat. Judging from his response, I was in the right place.

"She's here, right? I just want to talk to her. I won't be long."

"Hey, knuckleheads! Get this putz outta here!"

The two bouncers from the door came down the hall toward me. One of them stretched out a beefy arm and attempted to grab me. I responded by touching his hand and invoking **[Paralyze]** instead.

"Gwuh?!" He fell to the ground, and I quickly cast the same spell on the other guard. They were kind of just doing their jobs, but I didn't want them in my way.

"Bastard! Are you one of Zabbit's cronies?!"

The bearded businessman unsheathed a concealed dagger and swung it toward me. I had no idea who the hell Zabbit was supposed

to be. It was possible he was the guy in charge of Papillon's underground branch, though.

"Never should've come here!"

"[Slip]."

"Gaaah!"

The man suddenly stumbled over the ground itself and did a beautiful backward somersault. His dagger slipped from his hands and embedded itself in a part of the wall. That thing was sharp! I guess even being part of surface-level operations didn't make him any less of a crook.

"I don't know any Zabbit. I just want to meet with Silhouette. Let her know I need to see her."

"Urgh..."

The man glared daggers at me from the floor. He wasn't interested in cooperating, but I didn't exactly want to tear the place up.

Suddenly, a woman's voice called out from above us both.

"My, my... I'd appreciate it if you didn't raise more of a fuss."

"M-Ma'am?!"

There was a woman standing at the top of the curved staircase on one side of the hall, she slowly made her way down. She had long hair and hazel eyes, and seemed to be around twenty years old. Her body was... Curvy in all the right places, and pretty well-proportioned. The white cheongsam she wore hugged her figure, and the white lily-shaped hairpin she wore helped tie the whole look together. But the look itself wouldn't have been possible without the natural beauty she radiated.

This must've been Silhouette Lily, the Kageyuri.

She was definitely as gorgeous as the rumors said, but she was the kind of beautiful that would make me hesitate. For some reason, I felt like I needed to have my guard up around her.

“So you’re Silhouette Lily?”

“That is the case, yes. I don’t know who you are, sugar. It’s awfully rude to visit a working girl without a prior reservation. I’m rather busy.”

“I’m sorry for that, but I’d been informed that trying to arrange a meeting in advance probably wouldn’t have gotten me one anyway.”

“And who told you that?”

“Est, of the Red Cats.”

My response caused her to raise a brow, and her expression softened slightly. Silhouette Lily then smiled and continued down the stairs.

Ohh... Her legs are totally bare... And her thighs are kinda peeking outta the dress... Ghh... I’m weak against women like this...

“Seems you aren’t one of Zabbit’s tools, then. What do you want with me, boy?”

She came down the stairs fully and walked over to me with a crooked grin spreading across her cheeks. But I wasn’t paying attention to the gorgeous woman in front of me. I’d sensed something else. I whipped out my smartphone to confirm my suspicions, and my intuition was right.

“...Before that, can I ask something? There are around fifty people surrounding the building right now. Did you schedule a group meeting, or are they uninvited too?”

“Huh?” Silhouette blinked in confusion. At that moment, the stained glass windows lining the hallway shattered, and a few men jumped into the building.

At least I thought they were men. They were just humanoid. Thin Golems with clothing wrapped around them.

They had ruler-length blades jutting from their wrist mounts. The Golems completely disregarded me and the desk clerk and attempted to slash at Silhouette.

“Boss!”

The prone guardsmen cried out, unable to do anything. Their voices alerted me in time to channel my magic.

“[Shield].”

I raised my hand and thrust it in Silhouette’s direction, casting an invisible barrier between her and her attackers.

“What is this...?” Silhouette stood there in confusion as the Golems were deflected. They continued to smack against the barrier with their weapons, but it was pointless.

“Confine, o Ice! Everlasting Confinement: [Eternal Coffin]!”

After my chant finished, ice began to sprout up beneath the three Golems, and in seconds they were trapped inside rectangular pillars. It was an ancient spell I’d recently looked up in the library, they wouldn’t be able to escape.

Silhouette looked around in confusion before moving toward me from behind the pillars.

“...Did you just do that?”

“Should I not have?”

“No, I just... You saved my life... That was extremely dangerous... And those Golems... Oh... Wait, did you say we were surrounded?”

“We are, yeah. Want me to take care of them? I’ll do it if you listen to what I have to say afterward.”

“...Very well. If you can really handle them all, then that’s the least I could do.”

Ha! Gotcha! That’s a verbal contract! Alright, time to take out the trash.



“Alright, I guess that’s that.” I stood outside the Moon Parlor’s entrance, surrounded by collapsed black-clad men. They were all on the ground, of course... And their Gollems were sealed in frozen pillars.

I just want to be clear here, none of the men were dead. I didn’t even scrap their Gollems.

A bunch of thuggish-looking men came out of the Moon Parlor and dragged the unconscious men away. Part of me hoped they were going to hand the guys in to the authorities, but I also knew that was a naive expectation.

These guys were definitely not random, innocent citizens. Hell, their outfits basically reminded me of some kind of criminal secret service getup. Not to mention they all exuded a threatening aura. That kind of made them second-rate, in my opinion, but it wasn’t like they were trying to be subtle so it didn’t make much of a difference.

They were probably going to torture the unconscious attackers and find out who sent them. I had a feeling they already knew who the mastermind was, but it never hurt to break a few fingers to be sure.

“...You really managed it. Tell me, are you one of the Red Cats?”

“I’m not, no. But I am a friend of theirs.”

Silhouette’s voice reflected the fact that that she was still in shock from what she’d just witnessed.

“...Hmm. If he’s really attacking me so brazenly, it seems the time for peaceful negotiations is over.”

“Who, Zabbit?”

“Yes. Zabbit Grandt... He handles the underground affairs of Papillon.”

That was about what I had expected. He probably considered Silhouette to be a pain and wanted to kill her... Although, given how weak these guys were it was probably meant to be more of a message to her.

She’s really beautiful, after all... If the guy was really that scummy, he’d probably think of it a waste to have her die.

“He’s been harassing us more recently and has even done horrible things to the girls that work for me. Many of the girls have been emotionally wounded by his vile commands, as well... That man is a pig, and he’s been unspeakably cruel... I love the women that work for me, so I’d rather have them shake their hips in pleasure than shake their whole bodies in fear.”

If that was true, then it was pretty despicable. I didn’t like the idea of such a brute trying to take out Silhouette.

Still, the situation was getting pretty dangerous... Now that this intimidation attempt had failed, he could actually end up trying to kill her.

“Now, as I promised... I’ll talk to you. Please, come this way.”

Silhouette led me back into the Moon Parlor. Once I made it inside, I saw a large crowd of people gathered in the foyer.

“Wh-What?!”

I froze up on the spot when I saw them. They all stared at me. There were a few guys standing around, but most of the people were girls... And all of those girls were in varying states of undress.

Some were wearing skimpy dresses, allowing me to see their underwear... Some of them weren't even wearing bras. *Holy crap were... Were they with... clients? D-Doing it...? Doing... that?! Augh! W-Wait, some of them aren't wearing clothing at all!*

"Woow! You're, like, so stroong..."

"Thanks for saving us. Oh gosh!"

"Mmh... How about I give you a little present as thanks? Wanna spend the night between my legs, sugar?"

"Hey, don't just offer him that! You should let him slip into something comfortable first. Like me."

"O-Oh! N-No, ladies, please! I-I have some... I have some stuff to attend to, please!"

The girls started grabbing at me, pulling me back in no matter how many times I tried to escape their clutches.

Oh no... What's that nice smell? Hh... What's that soft feeling against my back?! What the hell? Did someone just kiss me on the cheek?! Wait, why is my arm wet? HELP!



“That’s enough, girls. Back to your bedrooms, I have business with the boy.”

Silhouette clapped her hands together and the girls begrudgingly returned to their rooms. Some of them were grumbling and muttering things like “No fair, the boss gets to hog him...” Some of the guys went into the rooms with them, too. Presumably, they were customers.

I’m glad it’s over.

“Are you alright, hm? Seems you were a little... Overstimulated. Are you perhaps unfamiliar with the touch of a woman?”

“...N-No comment.”

I sheepishly looked away from Silhouette, who was giggling up a storm. ...*That really caught me off-guard. It was a bit too much for me to handle.*

The air was a little awkward for a while after that, but we finally made it to the top floor of the brothel. We passed through a pair of heavy doors and came out into a fancy-looking room. From all the luxurious furnishings, I could’ve easily confused it for a royal bedroom. Not even the rooms back in Brunhild castle were this nice.

I sat down on the couch and looked around the room. When I looked up I noticed there was a skylight installed, giving me a full view of the full moon.

There was a little black cat curled up on a pillow next to me. I assumed it was probably Silhouette’s cat.

“Would you like a drink? A real drink, I mean... Or are you the kind who prefers fruit juice?”

“I’ll take the juice, please.”

Silhouette shrugged and brought a couple of drinks to the small table in front of the couch. She then sat on a chair opposite me. Her drink fizzed and bubbled quietly, it resembled champagne.

“So, what exactly do you want of me? I haven’t even heard your name yet, you know.”

“Oh... Sorry about that. I’m Mochizuki Touya. Right now... I guess I’m a visitor to this area.”

“A visitor? Very well. I’ll hear you out.”

With her permission, I laid out the general outline of what I wanted, and why. I told her about the golden monsters that would randomly appear around the world, and the fact that I could detect their emergence. Then, I told her I wanted her organization’s help in installing these detectors and information-gathering.

“Golden monsters, eh? We’ve definitely heard eyewitness reports of these things all over the place. I tend to hear things before anyone else does... A country lost an entire village to them, you know. Another country lost an entire squad of battle-equipped Golems to them as well. I do find it hard to believe that they’re invaders from another world, though.”

“You’re certainly well-informed...”

“Of course I am. I’m the head of all Papillon’s espionage, after all. It’s my job. I hear everything in this world, before anyone else. From major incidents in governments and politics to minor rumblings in thuggish crime families.”

I was impressed, but not terribly surprised. It would make sense that most towns in most countries would have brothels or inns, and some of those would probably be operated by Papillon to some degree.

If members of Papillon joined the staff there, or if they were the managers of the facilities, then gathering local information would be incredibly easy. That information would then be passed on to Silhouette. It was doubtful that every town in the world fell under Papillon's shadow, but it was highly likely that the majority of them were at least slightly tainted.

"And what would I gain for helping you, exactly?"

"...I mean, you'd get advance warning on when the mutants, er... the golden monsters, would arrive. It'd let you evacuate faster."

"That doesn't sound especially enticing... And it's not like they'll emerge near my towns every time, right?"

She wasn't exactly wrong. From a partnership perspective, it was obviously more for my benefit than hers.

But when the mutants began attacking more, she'd surely see the benefits... Not that I wanted it to drag out that long. It'd be too late if she only realized at the end.

I wondered what she'd stand to gain, or even what she'd want. She probably had something in mind already, given the sly grin on her face.

I sighed quietly as I realized what she was waiting for me to offer.

"...Fine. I'll handle the Zabbit guy. Is that enough?"

"Hehe... I like smart little boys... Things run much smoother when you know what a woman wants."

Her sly grin warped into a full-on smile as she crossed her legs. I quickly moved my gaze upward, as her cheongsam dress almost offered a glimpse into the void.

“Hmm... Now you have me curious. Could you have been involved in the incident between Primula and Triharan the other day?”

Heh, she even knows about that? Then again, there were a lot of eyewitnesses so I guess it's not that shocking...

I didn't have anything to hide, so I told her about how I supported the Primulan government, abducted the heir, and captured the head of the senate. I also told her I planned on cooperating with both countries going forward.

“So you can use teleportation magic? That's quite amazing... Could you perhaps grab Zabbit and bring him before me?”

“...I mean, yeah. I probably could. But what would you do? Kill him and become Papillon's sole leader?”

If Silhouette wanted to handle responsibilities like assassination and more morally messed up stuff, then I needed to reconsider whether I wanted to work with her or not.

Papillon wasn't exactly like the Red Cats, they weren't doing things in the name of chivalry or justice. I wasn't asking them to go completely straight and clean up their acts, but I couldn't overlook the really criminal stuff.

Silhouette must have noticed the shift in my expression. She leaned back and gave a dismissive wave of her hand.

“Me? Papillon's leader? No thanks. In truth, I'd like to sever ties with that branch entirely. If they hadn't started hassling us, I'd have left them alone and continued with my work... But Zabbit is a man of great greed and ambition, and he won't be satisfied unless he has his fingers in my pies too.”

“So you just want to handle inn management and brothel-running?”

“Not at all. In this world, money is power. And information is an incredible currency. I plan on continuing our intelligence operations, but not for overtly malicious purposes. If I used the information for extortion, it’d probably be against corrupt nobles or crooked merchants.”

That made sense. She wasn’t exactly shedding all criminal activity, but I could tolerate what she was describing to me. It was basically the same as what Nia and the Red Cats were doing anyway.

“For the time being, then... would it be enough to disable the underground portion of Papillon?”

“Mm... I suppose? What are your ideas, Mr. Mage?”

“Well, I could take the easy method and place a curse on them.”

“...That got dark all of a sudden. What do you mean by a curse?”

Silhouette raised a brow. I could understand her suspicion, but a curse was the easiest thing for it. I could simply curse him in a way that prevented him from taking action against us.

Then again, that wouldn’t exactly work, since I didn’t know all the members of the group.

“Do you know where the Zabbit guy is?”

“You won’t have to go far. He’s in this very city. He lives in the tallest tower in the northern sector.”

Silhouette stood up and pulled back a curtain. I looked out the window and saw a massive tower that shone out into the night.

I’d noticed it on my entry to the city. I’d actually thought it was a clock tower, but my guess had been wrong.

It reminded me of the Ryounkaku. It was a twelve-story building that had been around in Asakusa from 1890 to 1923. I’d read about it

in my history books during school. The tower I'd seen in the books wasn't quite so needlessly gaudy-looking, however.

I couldn't believe the creep was this close to us.

"Pretty flashy and self-indulgent for a criminal's home, isn't it?"

"As far as most people are concerned, he's just a merchant. Publicly, I'm just a brothel owner as well. We need cover identities, in the end. The citizens aren't aware of the true extent of our activities. Not even the merchants he does business with are aware he's a devil in disguise."

This guy was sounding slimier by the minute. Like a villain that only cared about himself. He was a far cry from the nobility of the Red Cats.

"Some of the girls who work at my brothel were homeless before I found them. I've heard stories from them that he has a bad reputation as an abuser of homeless people... It's like a game for him, teasing the lives of others..."

Silhouette's face turned sullen, but the tension was broken by a knock on the door. A maid appeared and apologized for the intrusion, before speaking with Silhouette. She quickly left after a brief exchange.

"What's up?"

"We have a confession from our attackers. They came here on Zabbit's orders, with the intention to threaten me. They were also told to kidnap me if the chance presented itself."

Well, that's that then. Guess I don't have to hold back against the guy.

"Can you tell me some of Zabbit's personal features? Physical features would be good."

“Hm? Well, uhm... he has wiry hair and a mustache. Oh, and he wears gold-trimmed glasses. He’s over thirty, and definitely looks middle-aged... He has a golden walking stick, too! And his eyes are super leery, like he’s undressing you with them!”

I felt like the last point was probably something exclusive to his interactions with Silhouette, but it was enough information to go off on.

I projected a map into the air and ran a search for Zabbit. I received exactly one hit based on the criteria, and it was a person in the highest room of the building.

Silhouette seemed surprised by my map, but I couldn’t be bothered to explain. *Hmm... The distance is about that far, and the angle is... Hmm...*

“Alright, be back soon.”

“Hm?”

Without stopping to explain, I used **[Teleport]** to warp straight from Silhouette’s room to Zabbit. My vision warped and I found myself facing an older-looking man with wiry hair. He was just about to tuck into a thick steak.

“Wh-Huh-How?!”

His mustache was wide and wiry, kind of like catfish whiskers, he was wearing a gaudy-looking changshan and had unnecessarily golden glasses. There was no doubt about it, he had to be Zabbit.

I immediately judged him to be the guy I was looking for, so I wordlessly walked over and grabbed him by the neck, then used **[Teleport]** to bring us back to Silhouette’s room.

“Guh!”

“Eek!” Zabbit groaned as I threw him to the floor, and Silhouette shrieked at our sudden appearance.

There we go, abduction accomplished. Barely took me any time at all.

...Maybe I'm getting a bit too used to this, though... This is the second time in this world that I've basically kidnapped someone... I'm a good guy, I swear!

"Wh-Who are you?! Where am I?! Don't you know who I am?!"

Zabbit scowled and yelled as he pointed the fork he'd been holding at me. It still had a chunk of meat on the end of it. After a short amount of time, he noticed Silhouette, and his eyes narrowed. He turned his hate-filled voice toward her.

"I see... So this was your doing? You stupid bitch. Had you shut up and obeyed me, I'd have let you keep your job... But you really have a deathwish, don't you?"

"I've said it once, and I'll say it again. I'm not going to work for you. Please refrain from bothering me and my workers again. This is your final warning."

"Pfft. There can only be one leader of Papillon, harlot. If you won't obey, then you'll simply die. Hey, you!"

I blinked in confusion and cautiously pointed toward myself.
What, me?

"Eliminate this slut. I'll give you all the gold and whores you can dream of. I'll even let you be one of my trusted aides. And if you work hard, you might even rise in the ranks of Papillon and—"

"You really are a moron."

"Gwaugh!" I pulled out Brunhild and fired a paralyzing bullet into his gut. He keeled over and faceplanted into the floor.

"D-Did you kill him?"

“Nope, just paralyzed him. He’s basically unharmed, and he’s completely conscious. He just won’t be able to move for a while.”

I used my foot to roll Zabbit over on to his back. His eyes were glancing around in fury. He was conscious, so he’d be able to see, hear, and feel everything going on. I crouched down at him and glared at him, speaking to him as coldly as I possibly could.

“Hey, scumbag. I’m about to place a curse on you. So long as you behave, like a good boy, you have nothing to worry about. The conditions are simple. Don’t do anything against Silhouette and her people, ever again. Don’t get involved with her affairs, either. Not only you, but your subordinates too. If even one of your cronies does something, the curse will trigger. Your entire body will slowly, permanently, be paralyzed... Eventually, the paralysis will creep into your rotten heart, and make sure it never beats again. Got it?”

The fear in Zabbit’s eyes was starkly visible. He had evidently gotten the message.

“So long as you abide by the rules, the curse won’t trigger. Just go about life honestly and properly, okay? If any of your subordinates harass Silhouette or her people, even of their own volition... Even if you didn’t ask, the curse will start spreading across your body. Better keep your men in check, creep.”

The conditions seemed pretty fair to me. It was all simple enough. I didn’t think it was an especially harsh curse, given the man’s crimes. Hell, he could easily reduce the chances of the curse triggering just by relocating his base of operations to another city.

“Brand, o Dark. Sinful Brand: [Guilty Curse]!”

The curse was applied, and a small insignia appeared on Zabbit’s forehead. It was the mark of his curse.

I used **[Recovery]** on him to relieve his paralysis. The moment I undid it, he hopped up in a seething rage.

“Y-You wretch, what did you do to me?!”

“Uh, I just told you, dude. I cursed you. Are you sure you wanna hang around here? I’m pretty sure you’re violating the curse conditions just being on her turf.”

“A curse?! Bullshit! Nonsense, that’s... Wh— My... My fingers... Why can’t I feel my fingers?!”

Zabbit clutched his right hand as his face paled. The curse activated once. If he didn’t hurry and leave, it’d keep going. Frankly, I was fine with having him suffer a bit of it, due to the things he’d done to Silhouette’s people so far. Plus, actually feeling the effects would make it more real to him.

I opened up a **[Gate]** to the room where he’d been enjoying his steak and kicked him back through it. It wouldn’t be as fun if he just died there and then.

With that, my mission was accomplished.

There was no way he could mess with Silhouette now, not unless he wanted to die. He also had to make sure his cronies didn’t try to start anything either.

Plus, he couldn’t exactly explain what had happened, either. If his people knew about the curse, then there could be some who’d bother Silhouette just to keep triggering the curse. He’d only be able to tell people he truly trusted, but I doubted he actually had people like that.

“Well, that’s the end of that chapter. He shouldn’t cause you guys any more trouble, I think. If he wants to maintain his hold over Papillon’s underground stuff, then he’ll have to do his best to ignore you and leave you alone.”

Silhouette stood and stared blankly at me for a while. When she finally finished processing what had happened, she gave me a timid nod.

“...That is quite the curse. So then, we’re freed from the shackles of Papillon... With a curse like that they’ll actively be avoiding us. This is incredible... It was a problem that had been on my mind for so long, and you took care of it so easily.”

Silhouette seemed utterly amazed. I didn’t know what to say, so I just shrugged a bit.

“I’ve held up my half. You gonna work with me now?”

“Definitely. Just let me know what I have to do.”

Awesome. Now I have the support of a massive information network in the Reverse World. Now all I have to do is gain access to an army that can physically fight the mutants.

There’s no Babylon in this world, either... It’s really just trouble after trouble for me...

“B-By the way... Do you have any plans this evening? Would you perhaps like to play a little downstairs? I’ll let you have the entire facility for the night, if you like...”

“Hm? Play?”

I didn’t really understand what she was getting at, but then I saw the coy smile on her face and the gears started to turn in my head. She was propositioning me.

“If you want, I’ll let you use me, too...”

Silhouette leaned forward in a way that revealed her cleavage. *Whoa, nope! Abort mission! This is too much!*

“N-No. No! Oh goodness, look at the time. It’s quite late, huh? Let’s go over the details of our business partnership later on, then! See you!”

“What a shame...”

I used my divinity to escape her seductive gaze, then warped straight back to Brunhild.

I was definitely bad with girls like her... The sexy older types... I felt like she’d chew me up and spit me out.

Not that I disliked them... I just needed to be clear about that. I didn’t exactly have an issue with people like her... They were just scary.

...Geez, what a day...



Several days had passed since I cursed Zabbit on behalf of Silhouette.

Without so much as a word, the man and everyone related to him suddenly vanished from the city.

It was understandable why, since he wanted to minimize any chances of encountering her or her people.

His gaudy tower had its lights switched off due to the sudden disappearance of its owner.

I had a feeling it wouldn’t take long for it to regain its luster, though. There were many merchants in this city, and surely one would want to live somewhere so unnecessarily luxurious.

Silhouette had no plans to take up residence there, at any rate. Her group also formally broke off from Papillon and rechristened their organization. They were now the Black Cats.

The name was similar to the Red Cats, and I think that was an intentional decision on their part. On the other hand, it could've just been named for the little cat in Silhouette's room. I didn't know for sure. It also seemed like they were now self-proclaimed rivals to the Red Cats, since they operated similarly.

I was in the middle of passing various items to Silhouette.

"So this is the device that can detect those golden monsters...?"

"Yeah. They can report how far the emergence point is from the devices, and in what direction. They can also predict when they'll emerge, so you can arrange evacuations. I'd like you to give one to each of the inns and brothels under your control, and get in contact with me whenever you get a reading."

Silhouette nodded along as I explained how the devices worked. She raised her brow in curiosity as I passed her a mass-produced smartphone. It only had my number on it.

I planned on giving phones to Nia and Est, but I didn't want Silhouette and Nia getting into phone contact with each other. Apparently, Nia had something against the brothel owner.

Est might've been able to make use of contact with Silhouette, but frankly, I didn't want to chance it. Both Est and Silhouette were cunning, so putting them together in private communication felt dangerous.

"Very well, then. I'll abide by our arrangement. I certainly can't renege now you've given me this. It seems like you weren't lying about how much of a worldwide threat they are, too... I'll be sure to contact you if we detect any emergency events, so don't worry about that. Now... Could I perhaps ask that the young women beside you calm down a little bit? They are aware that there's nothing going on between us, right?"

Silhouette grinned and jabbed a teasing comment in the direction of Yumina and Lu. The two of them were clinging tightly to either side of me.

“I-I know you aren’t a bad person, but you’re a threat to us. Please understand.”

“I-Indeed. Touya is ours, and we don’t exactly like the idea of him being led astray by you or your people... A-A-And don’t you think you’re showing a little too much skin?!”

“You’re certainly well-loved, Touya... I’m jealous.”

“Ahaha...” I could do nothing but laugh awkwardly. I was trapped between a rock and a hard place.



After I'd returned from the Reverse World, something bad happened. Apparently there was a lipstick kiss-mark left on my cheek, and the smell of perfume was also noticeable. The girls, understandably, lectured me on why I shouldn't be visiting brothels.

I was able to defuse the misunderstanding pretty quickly, but they still decided that I had to have people accompany me whenever I visited Silhouette and her establishment.

They really had no confidence in me. It was true that this place kind of riled me up, though... They probably noticed the place got me a little excited. But I couldn't help that. In case they hadn't noticed, I was a guy.

"Well, I can understand being upset about your guy hanging around my establishment... Still, it seems like you guys are all virgins, huh? So... Some of our girls and customers get off on being watched... Would you like to have a little look at them in action? It might prepare you better."

"Wh-What?! H-Have a look?!"

"A-Action?! What kind of action?!"

The two of them began shaking their heads rapidly. Their faces were completely red, and it looked like steam was about to shoot out of their ears.

Silhouette grinned broadly at the sight... She was clearly having fun at their expense.

Geez, the two of them are really sheltered... so it's not like they're good with adult situations. Hell, it's not like this world has a porn industry like my old world or anything... Wait...! I nervously stared at Silhouette, then glanced at the smartphone in her hand. Regret began to seep through me at the core.

...Th-The camera function on that thing... can record videos... And I know from my old world that sex sells... Don't tell me I accidentally started an adult video industry here... N-Not that I've seen any adult movies or anything! I'm underage. That would be immoral.

I turned my attention back to the two girls, I didn't want them passing out due to the blood rushing to their heads or anything.

"Fufu... Their innocence is really delicious."

"C'mon now, quit teasing them... They're innocent girls. They can't handle it."

"Oh, and you're saying I'm not?"

"Are you saying you are?"

"Not in the least."

We chatted a little further but eventually, we left the Moon Parlor behind us. The girls remained embarrassed the entire time we were there. After that, we headed off to the Red Cats, since there were a few things I needed to sort with them.

"Oh? Someone like you has a fiancée, Touya? Hell, you have two of them? Nice work, man! You must be a real ladykiller."

Nia latched on to that little detail just like I'd expected. Her eyes were practically glittering as she probed my fiancées for information like a gossiping old lady... She was certainly irritating.

What'd she mean by "someone like you," anyway?! She didn't have to be so damn rude.

"Actually there are nine of us. We'll all be marrying Touya at some point in the future."

"N-Nine?! Th... That's way too many! What are you, royalty?! Wait... Yeah, you are royalty! Is that kind of thing normal in the other world?! What gives?!"

Yumina's reply seemed to shock Nia, who responded by folding her arms and firing out rapid commentary.

...Nope, it's definitely a lot there, too. The king of Egret has like, seven, and that's considered a lot. Though I did hear that the piggy guy from Sandora had over twenty before he died.

"Putting that aside... These smartphones of yours... Is it really alright for us to have them? We appreciate it, but they seem to be quite sophisticated..."

"Yeah, I want you to have it. You'll need it in case of an emergency. It has functions installed into it like a notepad, a map, and even a calculator."

Est was skimming the user manual when she apprehensively asked us if it was really okay, but I said it was fine. Behind her, Euni and Euri were playfully taking selfies together with their own phones.

We'd swung by the Red Cat fortress hideout to give the four of them mass-production models. That was the primary purpose of the visit, but I also wanted to ask about something else.

"...I know it's kinda rude to ask for something in return, but I might need your help."

"Hmm? If it's something we can actually do, we'll do it for you!"

Nia was the leader so I felt like I was going over her head by asking Est about it, but... Est was basically the leader anyway.

I left the tent and took out several large oval-shaped capsules from **[Storage]**. They were each about the size of a mini-van.

"What are these?"

"They're called Frame Units. Yumina, Lu, could you demonstrate?"

"Yes, of course."

“Leave it to us!”

The two of them hopped up and, as if very used to it already, opened up the Frame Unit hatches and got inside. After a few moments, a low rumble came from the powered-up devices, and a large screen was projected into the air in front of them. It seemed like they’d chosen the Great Plain level.

On the holographic display, we watched a Shining Count and a Knight Baron materialize out of nothing and land on the field. Yumina was in the Shining Count, while Lu had taken the Knight Baron. Unlike the Frame Units in the castle, these ones didn’t have the relevant data pertaining to their Valkyrie Gears.

“Ohh! Those must be like that giant Golem!”

“This is... The thing from the other day?”

“Wh-Wh-Wh-What are those things?! How are we seeing them?! Where are they?!”

“Wow...”

All four of the girls showed varying degrees of interest. There were also some generic Red Cat soldiers staring at the screen with their mouths hanging open.

“These are Frame Units. They’re virtual reality training devices, designed to give you piloting experience for the Frame Gears.”

The battle on the screen had already begun. The white knight piloted by Yumina brought its sword against Lu’s black knight, but a shield swiftly blocked the hit. Lu then used the momentum to thrust forward with her halberd, but Yumina deftly ducked away from the hit.

“I’ll be letting you guys borrow these, so please have everyone in the fortress train using these... Just treat it as a leisure activity.”

“...You intend to prepare us for battle using the real things, don’t you?”

“I hope it doesn’t have to come to that, but... Yes. It’ll probably have to happen in the future. I think preparing you to wield something that can protect your world is a good thing, in the end.”

Est stared at the ongoing battle for a while in silence, and then she nodded.

“We’ll take them and treat them as a leisure item, then. If we can learn how to pilot these Frame Gears of yours, we might not need you to swoop in and save us like last time.”

I passed a manual to Est. It was less of a manual for Frame Units specifically, and more for Frame Gears in general.

The battle on the screen ended with Lu’s victory. She was definitely better than Yumina when it came to close-range fighting situations. That being said, the fight was a close one. I wondered if Yumina’s future sight had improved, given that she’d managed to hold her own so well...

It had been a while since she mentioned her power to view the future. When she last talked about it, it wasn’t exactly very useful, but if it continued to develop then it’d be a valuable asset.

I wondered if the other girls were also experiencing personal changes as their own individual potentials began to blossom, too...

The Frame Unit hatches opened up, and the girls clambered out.

“Alright, me next!”

“Ah, Nia... There might not be much point to you practicing with that thing, so there’s no need to overdo it.”

I stopped Nia as she charged toward the Frame Unit. She turned around and glared at me like I’d just slapped her in the face.

“Are you mocking me?! I wanna learn right away!”

“No, that’s not what I meant. Elluka has been working with one of my researchers to develop a Frame Gear based on Gollem technology. From what I understand, only legacy Gollems are gonna be capable of operating them, so we’ll probably want you to train using the new system we’re developing instead of this one. That’s why there’s no real point to you practicing with the Frame Unit, is all.”

I looked toward the small red Gollem next to Nia. I was hoping that we’d be able to make something that could fully bring out the potential of a crown model like Rouge.

“Well, okay... But there’s no problem with me practicing in this until then, right?”

“I mean, I guess not. Go ahead and play.”

“See?! It’s fine! Hey, Lu! Show me how this works!”

Nia grabbed Lu by the sleeve and dragged her toward one of the pods.

“...She seems quite the lively person.”

“...That’s just a polite way of calling her an idiot. Even Est agrees with me on that.”

Yumina was clearly trying to keep her regal poise about her. I just shrugged and sighed.

Euri and Euni went into two of the other pods as well. They seemed just as excited as Nia to give it a try. Lu hopped into the third, and Nia into the last one. Then they began their first lesson.

The four girls appeared on the screen. They began basic motions like jumping, crouching, and moving in different directions. They looked a little unsteady, but I was sure they’d pick it up. It was basically the same for our knight order.

Now all I needed to do was pass on Smartphones to the leaders of Primula and Triharan. I figured I'd bring Mentor Central... Or rather, Queen Palerius, to visit Primula as well.

It was a pretty wild story to think about. Both descendants of the same man, both became royalty in two different worlds...

If you put it in perspective, this was basically a family reunion five thousand years in the making. That was kind of a big deal... Though to be honest they probably wouldn't have much in common besides ancestry.

Actually, that reminded me, Elluka said something about a stone tablet that had been passed down the Primula royal family. It was possible I'd be able to decipher it, so I wanted to take a look.

I quietly pondered to myself as I watched the virtual Frame Gears training together on the display.



"Good day. I am the queen of Palerius Island, Central Palerius, descendant of Alerius Palerius."

"It's a pleasure to meet you. Welcome to Primula, Lady Central. I am the king of Primula, Ludios Primula Palerius, descendant of Lerios Palerius." The two Palerius descendants shook each other's hands firmly.

Lerios Palerius was Alerius Palerius' son, so they were basically descended from the same family.

After five thousand years, two branches of the same family had finally been reunited.

Queen Central wasn't alone. She'd brought a few escort knights and Millie West, the representative of Palerius Island's western city.

Millie asked us if she should come, and I was a little apprehensive about it... But I could understand her concerns about their island's queen heading to some unknown world alone.

I'd cast my translation magic on everyone so communication was completely fine.

The girls who had been chosen to, er... monitor my activities this time, were Yae and Hilde, so I had a sword-wielding duo preventing me from getting into hot water.

"You have my thanks, Sir Touya... For allowing a reunion that transcends space and time."

"Don't sweat it, honestly. It's only fair that you get briefed on your family history. The people of Palerius Island already knew about this world, after all."

I waved dismissively toward the King of Primula. It was probably about time for me to tell the other world leaders about the Reverse World... It was no longer just my issue alone.

"These documents were left behind by Alerius. We have various copies, so you may keep these."

"Fascinating, thank you... These are theories relating to Space-time magic? This is certainly going to be worth a read..."

Space-time magic was, in short, a separate form of magic from the six major schools, and Null. It seemed to be a form of magic that lent itself well to magical devices, meaning even those without any elemental affinities could make good use of it. The interdimensional gate on Palerius Island could be considered a culmination of that kind of research.

This world had items that employed that form of magic in a way that replicated the effects of my **[Storage]** spell.

They took the form of those storage cards, like the one Mr. Sancho had. Apparently, that tool became commonplace in the world due to the work of Lerios Palerius, who passed down his Space-time knowledge to future generations.

It seemed Primula was a pretty focused nation compared to others when it came to the pursuit of magical research. Its breakthroughs were still nothing compared to the level of the world I'd come from, though.

I passed them a copy of the magical book I'd given to Nia, as well. Hopefully, they'd be able to do some good with it.

"Now then... Lady Central, Sir Touya... There's something I'd like you to take a look at."

The king of Primula glanced to the left. A butler responded to the gesture by bringing over a wooden box and setting it on the table in front of us.

The box was rectangular, roughly A4 in terms of size, similar in size to a medium-sized notebook. The king opened it up, revealing a padded interior with a black stone tablet resting upon it.

"What is this?"

"This has been passed down to us since ancient times. It is the legacy of Lerios Palerius."

It was rectangular, much like the box it was kept in. The surface had been polished to the point where it was incredibly shiny, and as I leaned over it I could see the reflection of my face staring back. There were no distinguishing features on it at all, it was just a plain black tablet.

"Is... It a mirror, perhaps?"

Hilde tilted her head as she pondered. It could certainly be used as a mirror, but I doubted that was the primary intended function.

The king of Primula chuckled softly before handing off the tablet to Central.

“Would you mind channeling some of your magic through this?”

“My magic? Hm... Ah!” When Central poured a little magic into it, the tablet began lighting up with red-colored, glowing shapes. They kind of resembled cuneiform writing, a wedge-shaped symbol-based written language invented by the Sumerians.

After a while, the symbols vanished before appearing once more. The new ones looked similar, but they were a little different in places. Then, they vanished again before being replaced by another set. It seemed like the tablets were scrolling through multiple pages of text in an unknown language.

I wondered if this was similar to the messaging book that the adventurer’s guild used to communicate between branches.

“Each generation, the new king receives this tablet from his predecessor. The language written here was only understood by Lerios, so we have no idea what to make of it. Some speculate that it was the alphabet of the world Lerios came from to begin with.”

That was interesting. Plus, it explained why he was so eager to show us. But it was definitely my first time seeing this language... so it wasn’t the kind regularly used in the world I knew.

“Sir Touya... Have you perhaps seen these letters before?”

“Can’t say I have... This isn’t any of the ancient languages I’ve come across so far...”

Guess it’s a language they used five thousand years ago... Sucks, but I got no choice but to ask Doc Babylon about it... Or maybe I should ask Fam. It’s been a while since I went to the library... It’s kind of annoying dealing with that shut-in, though.

Just as I was about to tell them I'd return home for a bit, Central opened her mouth.

"Actually... this is a language passed down on Palerius Island. It was originally used by an unnamed tribe, and Alerius Palerius used the language in some of his inscriptions."

"R-Really?! Th-Then you can read this, Lady Central?"

"I can. Not just me, either. All four of the descendants that govern the major cities on Palerius Island should be able to read it. Millie? Can you make this out?"

Central passed the tablet to Millie, who was seated beside her.

"...Yes, it's plain as day. There are some parts where the structure is a little awkward, but I can generally grasp the full meaning. Given that I'm the most educated about this language as far as our island goes... I should be able to produce a passable translation."

Lerios, the first king of Primula, was Alerius' son. It made sense that he'd write using the same languages as his father. But given that it seemed to have been written in something obscure, it must have been something the guy thought was worth encrypting.

"Hm... Is this a historical record? No... From the layout, it's more like a diary... Hm? This part here... Crystalline beasts... Oh! Is this referring to the Phrase?"

"The Phrase?! Is there something about them written there?"

"Yes, it seems so... There's some more difficult stuff here I can't fully make out, but... Give me a little time and I'll have something."

After Millie spoke, the king of Primula called over his butler, who brought a few bundles of paper to the table.

"These are copies of the text from the tablet. Please use them as you see fit."

“Thank you. That helps. Could I have something to write with?”

Millie scanned her eyes over the pages, occasionally narrowing her eyes and writing down a rough translation of what she was reading.

Central read the entries on the stone tablet at the same time, her expression flittering between confusion and shock now and then. The rest of us could do nothing but wait around.

Damn it. If I knew the name of the language, I'd just be able to read it myself...

After a while, Millie put down the paper and passed them over to the king of Primula.

The king began passing me the papers that he'd finished reading, allowing me to take a look at what we were dealing with.

It was like a mixture between a diary and a historical record, meaning that the tablet was probably like a personal memorandum book that belonged to Lerios.

I began reading the papers that chronicled the strange adventures of Lerios Palerius.

Today's Date: 19th of Skywater, 2015

■ The eastern capital is gone. Crystals consumed it. They're making tracks for the grand capital now. Father, rest his soul, will see his wishes granted by my elder brother. My brother has departed for the island, along with the other disciples and their families. Once we trigger the barrier on the island, the crystals won't be able to get us. But on the other hand... We won't be able to see the outside world ever again. Though such fears seem futile now, I doubt there'll even be a world to go out to once all this is over. This is our only method

of survival, so we must grasp it with both hands. But even if it is what will save us, I can't help but feel guilty.

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Today's Date: 21st of Skywater, 2015

■ I'm supposed to be heading off to the island soon, toward the gate our father dedicated his life to building. But I can't. This country needs me. Much like my father before me, I have found a purpose. I need to trust this person, and the two they've brought with them. They're come from another world, after all. With their help, we may yet set things right. We might even be able to drive these crystals from our world... I must be honest, our chances are slim... But I'm willing to bet it all on this last chance. I will believe in this mysterious stranger, and the white and black he holds dominion over.

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Partheno's Date: 3rd of Soilguide, 2015

■ There has been a complication... The white and black's power has run completely wild due to their master falling to despair. As a result, the vast majority of the crystals were purged from my world. But the reckless and distorted nature of their might affected all in the area without discrimination. I have crossed into another world entirely. My entire family is back there, and I cannot reach them. I see the irony in that avoiding the destination set out for me by my father, I have ended up achieving the very thing he sought to reach. I wonder if I'll be trapped here forever...

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Partheno's Date: 5th of Soilguide, 2015

■ I have no hope here. The magic of this world is far less developed than that of my home's. I'm all alone here, and I have little in the way of communication. I find it hard enough to survive here, so what hope have I of reaching my home again? My thoughts constantly drift back to those I've left behind. Brother... All of you on that island... Were you caught in their rampage? Are you safe?

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Partheno's Date: 17th of Shineloop, 2015

■ I've been welcomed into a tribe of people. They're called the Primula. By sheer coincidence, the young girl I saved happened to be the daughter of the tribe's chieftain. It seems my suspicions were right, and magic isn't well-developed in this world at all. My abilities may pale compared to my father, but I can still use it well enough to amaze and stupefy the tribesmen. It's somewhat amusing to me, though, given that I find their usage of these mechanical dolls just as strange and incredible. Regardless, these people are kindhearted, friendly, and clearly appreciative of my deeds. I've decided to stay with them for a while longer. I'm grateful for the company.

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Partheno's Date: 6th of Dusknight, 2019

■ The war between the Primula and the Zalza is over. The Primula have won. That means that Primula controls most of the territory in the area. It has been some time since my last entry, but in that time much has happened. I took the daughter of the chieftain as my bride and ascended to the position of leader myself. I have been uniting the tribes through negotiation or force, and we are now the Kingdom of Primula. I have not fully lost hope. My brother and the other islanders will surely find a way to this world soon enough, which is why I must secure this territory in order to keep them safe when they arrive. I'm hoping to meet with them soon, so that we might finally reunite. I hold that hope in my heart as I continue my work here.

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Partheno's Date: 17th of Flamewing, 2051

■ It is my fondest hope that... Someday... Be it in the lifetime of my children, or their children, or their children's children... That those who found themselves on the island will pass through my father's Gate and make their way here, to their true home. When that time comes, I hope the people of Primula will greet them with warm drinks, open arms, and boundless love. Please. Treat them kindly. This world would be sadder if it experienced any more of the loneliness I had to endure.

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I put down the papers and let out a deep breath. If this was true, it meant Lerios came to the Reverse World after the accident that removed the invading Phrase army.

His brother and the others closed themselves away on Palerius Island, never realizing that Lerios had gone and done something that saved them all... And that was where they stayed for five thousand years, fending off Behemoths all on their own.

The Palerius lineage has suffered a lot...

I'd assumed Lerios had passed through to the Reverse World before his dad died, but it seemed like I was wrong.

Still, there was a more pressing matter I wanted to address. I turned to the king of Primula.

"The white and black mentioned in the text here..."

"Mm... They're likely Gollems. The black is surely the black crown, Chronos Noir. The white is likely the white crown, as well."

Knew it. Old man Palerius probably got info on building his gate after meeting the two Gollems and whoever their master was. Then I guess he passed away without being able to complete the whole thing. His eldest son then found the island, while his second son got blasted into the Reverse World...

"Touya-dono... This diary is strange, it is... If we go by it, then the white and black should be somewhere in our world, they should."

"Yeah, I guess... But I think I heard the black crown and its master exist in this world nowadays..."

Euri had mentioned something like that, if I remembered correctly. She'd said something about the black crown's master being a rival of sorts to Nia.

But in that case, how did the black crown make its way back to this world after the disaster? I wondered if it had been accidentally

blown back here like Leros, or if maybe that was just its power to begin with.

But that made me wonder what was up with the white crown. If it had something to do with the world's boundary being repaired, then I wanted to know about it.

Either way, I clearly had to meet up with this black crown.

"Do you know where the black crown is?"

"I'm afraid not. The black crown and its master came through here a few days ago, but they left after I mentioned a few things about Elluka."

"Hm? Why would the black crown's master be asking after Elluka?"

"Hm? You didn't hear from her? The black crown's master is Elluka's younger sister."

Wait, what?! I didn't know that at all... Why wasn't I informed?!

"I did mention a few things related to you as well..."

Before the king of Primula could carry on talking, my smartphone started ringing. I apologized for cutting him off, then picked up the phone. It was an incoming call from Shirogane, on Drakliff island.

"Sup. Something wrong, Shirogane?"

"I'm terribly sorry to call you while you're in the middle of things, but there's a spot of trouble over here..."

"What is it?"

"Well... There's an intruder on the island, and they're causing quite a stir. It seems to be a girl, and she's demanding you show yourself. It's a young-looking girl and a Golem, yelling accusatory remarks. She claims you kidnapped her sister... I'm afraid the way

things are going, your holiday home could very well be a target soon.”

Huh? Kidnapper? Me? I mean sure, I’ve done a little kidnapping here and there... but that doesn’t make me an actual kidnapper!

I wondered if this sudden intruder was the younger sister of Elluka. If she was, this was a serious speak of the devil moment. I certainly hadn’t expected to be hunted down. I asked Shirogane to tell the rampaging girl to calm down and wait for me, then hung up the phone.

Guess I’ve got no choice but to drag Elluka with me. Seems like whoever the girl is, she’s pissed. But still, don’t call me a kidnapper! Elluka’s the one who asked to come with me!

Geez... Red, blue, purple... Seems like no matter which crown contractor I find, there’s always something wrong with them. Wonder if this girl’ll be any better... But there’s only one way to find out.



There were several unconscious Dragons laying around Drakliff island’s beachfront. None of them were dead, but their injuries looked grievous.

There was a barrier on the island that prevented non-Dragon intruders from entering. It was at its edge on the beach that I found the young girl, who stood atop a fallen Dragon with her arms crossed.

She wore a white blouse with a thick black ribbon at the neck, along with a black skirt and tights combo from the waist down. Standing by her was a small, knightly-looking Gollem. It was jet black and had a long scarf. A little bit behind the two stood a maid with short, violet hair. She had a regretful expression on her face, but I was wondering why there was even a maid here to begin with.

The girl herself was really small... She was younger than Sue, hell she looked younger than Renne. I estimated she was around six or seven years old. Despite her looks, I sensed a strange kind of smug aura emanating from her as she glanced around.

I was using **[Long Sense]** to view her from the safety of my mountain villa, so there was no way she could've seen me.

"That's your sister?"

Elluka wordlessly responded to my query by nodding her head rapidly. I projected the image of her into the air, and just looking at the girl prompted Elluka to sweat profusely. I wondered if she was afraid for some reason.

"Alright, let's go talk to her. If you can just explain the situation, then we—"

"No way!"

She outright refused. She immediately began clinging on to the nearest object, as if preparing to hang on for dear life.

"She'll get angry! You won't like her when she's angry!"

"What are you, a little kid? Come on..."

I stared blankly at Elluka, who had planted her feet firmly against the ground and kept on shaking her head. I wondered if she was really the elder sibling in this situation. Yae, Hilde, and I were at a complete loss. What were we supposed to do? Elluka was older than us, but she was acting like a little kid.

I glanced at Fenrir, her wolf Gollem companion, and quietly implored him for help.

"Mph... My master is rather bad at dealing with her sister. Given that she left this world and took off without even informing the girl, she'll surely be quite angry... I'm not entirely sure if I can do anything here."

“She didn’t contact her, she didn’t? Is there a reason she did not, is there? Surely she could have sent a letter, she could.”

“If I’d sent a letter, she’d have been able to trace where it came from! And if she traced it, she’d come capture me!”

...What are you, a runaway? Why are you that scared of making your little sister mad? If you’d just communicated properly before coming to Babylon, we wouldn’t have this issue!

“My master likes to charge into action without considering the implications. She’ll often forget her circumstances and charge into new opportunities whenever she can. It is a poor habit on her part.”

I could certainly see that. She came to another world without any hesitation on her part... So I could probably understand why her sister would be frustrated.

Regardless, sitting around wasn’t going to solve anything.

“Alright, let’s go.”

“Nooo!”

Hilde grabbed Elluka by the legs, but she held on for dear life and absolutely refused to budge.

She was like a little kid throwing a tantrum, and it was starting to piss me off.

“Perhaps, Touya... You could speak to my master’s sister first? If you explain the circumstances, she may calm down... Potentially...”

“Ugh...”

I wasn’t really good with kids that thought they were tough. That one time the king of Palouf’s fiancée picked a fight with me, I ended up making her cry.

Hell, she was even younger than the girl I fought... I had my doubts she’d even understand my explanation. I shrugged, then

asked Yae and Hilde to watch over Elluka while I reluctantly walked down to the beach.

The little girl stood atop the unconscious earth dragon, glaring in my general direction.

The two of us stared each other down, the barrier the only thing between us. Due to the fact that she was standing someplace elevated, I had to look up to meet her gaze.

“Are you the Mochizuki Touya that the king of Primula told me about?”

The girl looked down on me condescendingly, the effect amplified by the fact that she had the high ground. *D-Damn... She sounds a lot sterner and more confident than I expected.*

Given that she's strong enough to make it out here, too... This might not go so well.

“That’s right. You’re Elluka’s sister, right? What’s your name?”

“Norn. Is something funny? What’s with your face?”

“Ah, no... Sorry. I just know someone else with that name.”

I smirked for a half-second in surprise. She had the same name as one of our higher-ups in the knight order back in Brunhild, Norn. It wasn’t a super rare name, apparently. They definitely had different personalities, though.

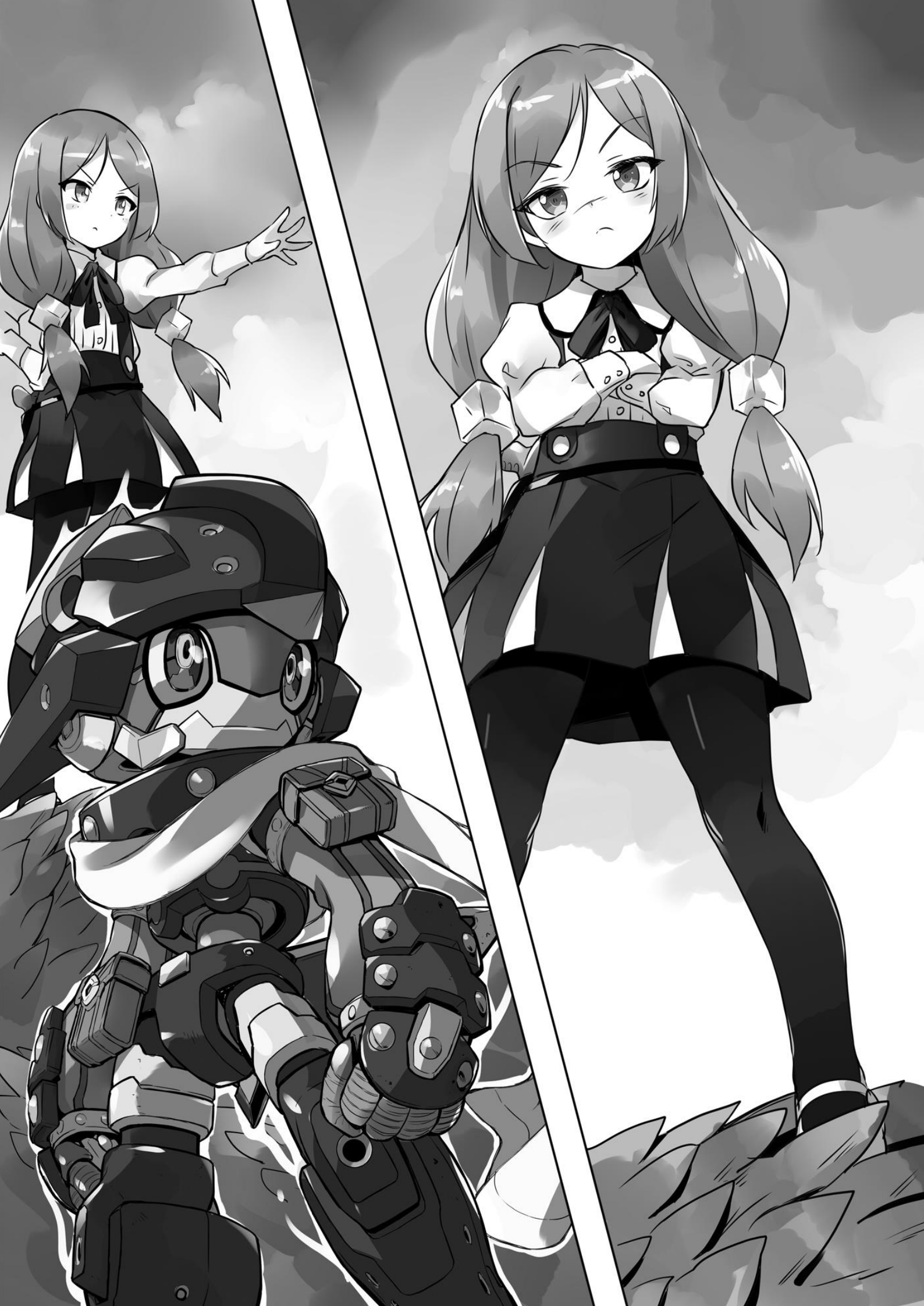
“So? Where’s my sis?”

“Cowering up there, for now. She doesn’t wanna come down.”

“...I’d have let you off with a light beating if you played along, but you’re going to hold her hostage?”

“Huh?”

“Noir!”



The black Golem charged toward the barrier and smashed its fist into it.

Obviously it wasn't strong enough to break through, and its tiny fist was held back by the invisible wall.

...You're really gonna attack like that? Talk about hot-blooded.

"Hey, listen to me. I didn't kidnap your older sister, okay? She tagged along with—"

"Noir! Summon Weapon No. 10: **[Newton]**!"

"Affirmative."

Before I could even finish my sentence, the black crown materialized a massive hammer out of nowhere. It was ridiculously oversized! The Golem itself wasn't even one meter tall, but the hammer was easily the size of a minivan. I had no idea what to say.

A shattering sound rang out as it brought the massive thing down, and the barrier protecting the area crumbled. Clearly that hammer of his was no ordinary weapon.

"Noir! Summon Weapon No. 9: **[Schrodinger]**!"

"Acknowledged."

Norn called out, and the black crown responded. The enormous hammer vanished into particles of light, replaced by two magical-looking guns.

A bolt of lightning shot from each of the guns. It didn't look strong enough to be fatal, but I wasn't going to sit around and take it either.

"[Absorb]."

I used my magic to drain the incoming blast. Several shots followed, but all of them met the same fate.

I needed to take out the Golem, but I didn't want to break it. I decided on the next best thing.

“[Prison].”

The crown pulled out the hammer again at the last second, but I'd mixed some of my own divinity into this particular spell. It wasn't going to break.

The black crown was now encased in a partially see-through cube, about one meter in diameter. With the Golem immobilized, I leaped toward the girl atop the unconscious Dragon.

“Milady!”

The maid, who had been standing off to the side, suddenly pulled out a thin blade from nowhere and came charging at me. *Yikes, can't be doing that...*

“[Paralyze].”

I moved to the side and grabbed her by the wrist, then cast my spell. But... For some reason, the maid wasn't affected at all.

“Wh—?!” I dodged her follow-up attack and regained my composure. She seemed physically strong, but untrained in swordplay, which meant her strikes were too telegraphed.

My spell didn't work? Does she have a talisman or something? I didn't expect the people in this world to have stuff like that...

“Sorry, but... **[Gravity].”**

“Eek!” I placed my hand on the maid's shoulder and she came crashing down to the ground.

“Guh!”

Norn suddenly pulled out a magical gun from under her coat. She pointed it down at me.

“[Slip]!”

“Gaaah! My spellcaster!” Norn slipped and fell down from the Earth Dragon, dropping her weapon in the process. I quickly sealed her up in a **[Prison]**, much like her Gollem. With that, it was checkmate.

“Gwuh! Open this right now, you bastard! Kidnapper! Coward! What school of magic do you draw from, huh?! Perversion?!”

“...There’s nothing perverted about me. What are you talking about?”

I suddenly frowned as I looked at the girl, who was now frantically pounding her fists against the walls of her confines.

Hm... Does she think I kidnapped Elluka for her body or something? Urgh... That’s pretty messed up.

I sighed quietly and shook my head. There had been a fundamental misunderstanding that I had to clear up.



“...So yeah, now you know the story. Elluka asked to come to my world. Pretty firmly, might I add. Do you get it now?”

“...I understand, yes. There’s a lot of it that seems odd to me, but I have a good grasp on the situation... It seems my sis has caused you a bit of a headache.”

My shoulders sagged in relief. I was glad that someone as young as her even understood what I was talking about, but given that her sister was some kind of unparalleled genius, it stood to reason that this girl would be following suit.

“...So, would you mind letting me out of here?”

“Oh, my bad.”

I released the **[Prison]** around Norn, ending her grumbling.

I also dispelled the cage around Noir and dispelled the effects of **[Gravity]** that I'd cast on the maid.

The maid dusted herself off and bowed her head.

"Well then, nice to meet you. Name's Norn Patolakshe. This is my Gollem, Noir. My maid here is named Elfrau... What's with the funny expression?"

"Oh, sorry... It's just, there's a country in my world called Elfrau..."

"Oh. And you said I had the name of someone you knew, too? That's kind of annoying."

Yes. It definitely was.

"My name is Elfrau. If that's too confusing, you may refer to me as Frau."

Elfrau said something that reminded me of my maid, Cesca. Surely El would've been a more logical nickname? Kind of like how Fran would've been a better nickname for Francesca than Cesca... Perhaps there was some unwritten rule I was unaware of.

"So, my dumb sis is up there?" Norn pointed up the trail toward my villa.

Dumb sis, huh...? I guess even being a world-renowned genius doesn't matter when family's concerned.

"Fenrir's with her, too. Elluka ended up panicking because she thought you'd be mad at her."

"Obviously I'm mad at her! Not only did she go to another world without telling anyone, she spent two whole years wandering around! She's been walking all over the world, causing trouble... And who do you think has to mop up her messes?! Me! I've been suspected of crimes thanks to her! I got involved in shady stuff with

casino owners because of her! All sorts of dumb stuff! I have more than a few words for her!”

It seemed like Norn had quite a few bones to pick with her elder sister. I decided the wisest thing to do was let them both hash it out.

“...Man, you sure have it tough. Elluka sure is a bad sister, having a little girl like you take care of her problems.”

“Ack, don’t say that...!”

“Ill-advised language detected.”

The maid, Frau, and the black crown, Noir, both attempted to warn me in their own ways.

Hm? I turned and wondered what they were talking about, which distracted me from Norn’s quick-draw on her gun. She brandished the spellcaster with a menacing fire in her eyes. Then, she dashed forward and, at point-blank range, blasted a metallic pellet right into my groin.

“Hngh! Ghhh!”

I couldn’t even speak. All the wind was knocked out of my lungs and I fell to my knees. Then, I curled into the fetal position, cradling my precious crown jewels beneath my palm.

Hngh... I-It hurts...! I-It hurts... Ghhh... Ghaaaugh! Why?! What I felt was the pinnacle of male body pain. Sweat caked my face, my back, my arms, and my legs. The sensitivity made it hard to move, so all I could do was writhe atop the sand.

There wasn’t anything I could do but ride through the agony.

“Don’t you dare call me a little girl! I’m fifteen!”

Fh... Fifteen? Th-That’s the same age as Linze and Elze, isn’t it? Nngh... I-It’s still hard to breathe... Oh... I can see... I can see a white light... Is it my time already?

The surprise attack was driving me wild with anguish. She couldn't possibly have understood what I was experiencing.

"A-Are you okay?"

"N-Not... really... But... let me lay here... fhh... for a while..."

Frau rushed over, but I just shook my head. There was nothing anyone could do for me. I just had to wait...

Something similar happened to me once in the past... It was the work of the storehouse's Terminal Gynoid... That clumsy idiot, Parshe... I didn't expect to receive this kind of critical damage again. I was careless...

"Suggestion: Apologize for rash action."

"Guh... No way, Noir! He was rude to me first!"

The Gollem turned toward its master and shook its head. If she was six, maybe this would be forgivable, but there was no way I'd forgive a teenager for this... Hell, I wasn't so sure I would've actually forgiven a six-year-old.

Seemed like she had a complex regarding her physical appearance. Which seemed fair, given that she looked to be around six or seven years old. She definitely wasn't part of a race with a long lifespan like Leen, either... so I wondered what was up with her.

I quietly cursed her name as the dull pain continued coursing through my gonads. It was at that moment I made a silent vow to enchant my pants with **[Shield]** as soon as I possibly could.

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Chronos Noir.

That was the name of the black crown. Its abilities were space-time manipulation.

It was capable of pulling things from alternate realities and different worlds for about a minute.

Those abilities weren't limited to physical objects, either. It could pull forth alternative concepts such as weight, resistance, strength, or even alternate versions of itself. It can use these to amplify its own powers. But such power obviously comes with a price, as with all the other Golems. The black crown could only use the full extent of its abilities during the night, and whenever it did, its master's physical age was reversed in proportion to the strength of the ability.

In terms of time magic, it could peek a few seconds into the future, enhance its own speed, and even slow down enemies. However, it wasn't capable of stopping or rewinding time... Not yet, at least.

"So what you're saying is..." Doctor Babylon took a few steps to her right, then pointed to where she'd just been standing.

"Let's call where I'm standing right now Point A. Let's call where I'm pointing, where I was a few seconds ago, Point B."

"Okay."

"And a couple seconds before that, I was standing over here. Let's call that Point C. A few seconds before that, I was standing right there. Let's call that Point D. So now, each second has left an imprint in time, and I exist in those particular positions for the seconds I spent in them. To be blunt, the black crown doesn't pull things from different worlds so much as different times. It could realistically pull the me from Point B, the me from Point C, and the me from Point D out into this moment in time, allowing me to interact with them from Point A. It would be temporary, but four of me would exist in this world at the same time." *Four copies of the doc? No thanks.*

But, hm... I kinda get it, but... If the me from a couple seconds ago was pulled out of time, wouldn't that erase the timeline that brought me here in the first place?

"Time flows in a singular pattern, but infinite possibilities still branch from the forward march. Here I am right now, standing. But in five seconds, I could be to the left, or right, or forward, or backward. If I move forward right now, and the black crown called upon the hypothetical me that moved backward, the flow of time that led to me being here wouldn't be disrupted at all."

So it's basically like a parallel world kind of deal? I guess you see that stuff in fiction all the time. I know time paradoxes get used as cheap plot points, too. For example, the Grandfather Paradox, the one that posits a scenario where you go back in time and kill your grandpa before you or your parents were born. What would happen then? From what I understand, the death of the grandfather would prevent your own birth, but that also means you could never have traveled back to kill him in the first place... That's the paradox, basically.

But there's also the idea that killing the grandfather would create an off-shoot reality that preserves the universe by preventing the paradox. It would create two worlds running in parallel. One in which the grandfather survived, and went on to have the family that produced the grandchild... and one in which the grandfather was killed, and thus the grandchild was never born...

In short, it was a "what-if" sort of world, with infinite possibilities. It seemed like Noir's ability reached into hypothetical potentials, and manifested them as realities without compromising the past. And that was pretty incredible. If I had faced Noir at night, it might've been really dangerous... But given the toll the contractor had to pay, it might not have been so simple.

"So it's not exactly pulling things from other worlds, then."

“Not quite, no. More like pulling things from the same world, in a different hypothetical timeline. In the many worlds under the survey of that god you mentioned, I’m sure one or two are nearly identical, aside from a few little differences. You can consider alternate timelines to be kind of like that. Identical to this world, but tweaked due to different actions.”

Made sense to me. The idea would be that there was a single world, and a single flow of time, so Noir wasn’t pulling things from other places, just other potentials.

“Wonder if that’s the power that pushed the Phrase back five thousand years ago...”

“I wonder, too... I don’t think the ability alone could push back so many hundreds of thousands of Phrase from the world, though. Elluka hasn’t done much in the way of uncovering information on that, and it seems like Noir has undergone multiple memory wipes since then... There’s nothing we can do for now. Not to mention the fact that messing around with its abilities is dangerous, given the price its contractor has to pay.”

The cost of mastering a crown was a heavy burden. The fact that its true abilities could only be used at night was probably a blessing in disguise.

Apparently the weapons it brought out against me during the battle were just supplementary gear and abilities installed on to it by Elluka and had nothing to do with its actual innate power.

In Noir’s case, when it used its temporal abilities, Norn’s age would regress. She was fifteen, but looked around seven or six due to repeated use of these powers.

At first glance, it might seem incredible since it can basically guarantee immortality, but using it one too many times could have you regress to a fetal state, which would basically be the same as

death. And the fact that she looked so young meant that Noir had consumed at least eight or nine years.

It was a little bit of a scary power... But if used sparingly, the time could be gained back just by waiting and growing. Norn would grow to be physically fifteen again if she waited those eight or nine years she'd lost. Though mentally, she'd be in her twenties at that point.

Apparently commenting on her height or looks was ill-advised, and it was simply within her instincts to attack anyone that pointed it out. Or that was what Noir told me, at least. I remembered a movie I saw once that had a protagonist who got reflexively upset when he was called a chicken. That movie involved a time machine too, actually... A bit of an amusing similarity... But nothing more than a coincidence, in the end.

Elluka got chewed out by her angry sister, but I could glean little snippets of legitimate concern and worry for Elluka's wellbeing in the girl's harsh words. Seemed like she was hiding her real feelings behind a harsh façade... Maybe.

"So, what is the little lady Norn doing right now?"

"She's going to stay in this world for now, since Elluka doesn't plan on leaving Babylon any time soon. I asked her if she wanted to stay in the castle, but she said no and booked out a stay in the Silver Moon instead."

"Hmph... Well, it's helpful to have a crown on hand. Hopefully it'll help us out... Now, on to more pressing matters." Doctor Babylon picked up a bundle of paper, set it down on top of her desk, and flipped through it. It was a full copy of the translated journal left behind by Lerios Palerius.

"We're assuming the white crown is still in this world, right...? Have you tried using your magic to locate it?"

"I have, yeah. But there were no hits. I've seen the red, blue, black, and purple crowns at this point, and they all looked visually similar. Given their distinct similarities, I don't think the white crown would look much different." If my magic couldn't locate it despite all that, it either meant that the white crown's appearance had changed, or it was hidden behind a magical barrier.

It was possible that the master of the black and white crowns from five thousand years ago ended up sealing the white one somewhere for safety.

"Actually, something concerns me regarding the master mentioned in the diary. The compensation for Noir's abilities is regression of age, right? And it was used to wipe out the Phrase some five thousand years ago. I'm fairly sure that the cost for such a feat would be massive... Even if their master was extremely old, it wouldn't surprise me to find that using the ability turned him into a zygote and killed him immediately."

"So you're saying he must've died when he used Noir?"

"Not... exactly? There's a possibility of him belonging to a non-human race with a longer lifespan, after all... We can't draw any conclusions, but I did think of another possibility. I was wondering if the white crown's contractual price could be the opposite of the black crown's."

The opposite? If the black crown's price is age regression, then... age progression?

"My current hypothesis is that the white crown's price is physical aging. By using the white and black crowns in tandem, it's possible that their master could use their abilities with no cost whatsoever... That's just a theory, though."

Opposite prices, huh? Growing old, and growing young... A plus and a minus... Or rather, a minus and a minus that form a plus in this case, I think.

Well, that was all hypothetical. There was no point in thinking about how it worked without solid proof.

“Well, let’s put that aside for now... How’s the Gollem research coming?”

“Quite well, actually. Would you like to see a sample unit?” Doctor Babylon produced a strange sphere with robotic limbs and a head sprouting from it. It was a miniature model of what we were hoping to produce in the end.

Design-wise, it was pretty different from a Frame Gear and felt a little more coarse. It wasn’t colored either, but that was probably just because it was a test model. There were various areas with clear parts incorporated into the design. On the real thing, they’d be made of Phrasium.

“The Gollem’s core is encased inside, then submerged in a gel that can transmit magic much more efficiently. After that, it amplifies the power output. Putting the details aside, the end product would be something just as strong as a Frame Gear, with the capabilities of boosting Gollem skills.”

“Interesting...”

“We need to be careful when experimenting with the Crowns, though. We don’t want to accidentally amplify the cost of their abilities.”

That was definitely true. Depending on the Gollem, that could cause disastrous effects. Especially for Nia’s Rouge or Norn’s Noir.

“Could normal Gollems be powered up, too?”

“Yep. We can use the sphere core as a base, then swap out parts to change the model. If we used Fenrir as a base, for example... it’d become animalistic, like this.”

As she spoke, Doctor Babylon popped off the limbs and head from the humanoid model and fitted new parts into the empty slots.

Before long, the once-humanoid robot was quadrupedal and vaguely resembled a wolf. It seemed like the customization of these new machines was much higher than that of the Frame Gear.

We’d be able to customize them to accommodate any kind of Golem... But stuff like Mr. Sancho’s crab bus would probably be out of the question.

This would definitely give us the edge in the battle against the mutants. Even non-crown Golems would be able to hold their own against them if powered up in this way.

The Reverse World’s boundary line was in way better condition than the tattered one in this world, so it was doubtful any seriously scary enemies would show up there... But it was still way better to be safe than sorry.

“So, how close are we to completing these?”

“Around sixty percent, I’d wager. We still need to make tweaks to the crown functionality, though. That’ll take a while.”

Hmm... I don’t exactly want to force them to rush, but we need to keep up with our enemies. Guess the best I can do right now is wish them luck.

I left the research laboratory and headed for the rampart. I wanted to speak with the group over there.

“Yo, Touya. Been a little bit.”

“We should eat katsudon for dinner tonight...”

“Lady Melle, we had that two days ago... My personal vote goes to ramen.”

“Fish. We should have sashimi. With heaping bowls of rice...”

I sighed quietly as I looked at the four of them. They’d certainly made themselves at home... I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry at how easily they’d gotten accustomed to living here.

“So, have you guys come to a conclusion?” I turned toward Ende and asked him the question, while glancing at the Phrase. The Sovereign Phrase, Melle, was chomping on some cookies. Ney and Lycee were sitting opposite her, eating apple pie.

“Mm, not exactly. We’re still undecided as to what tonight’s dinner will be...”

“Not that, moron.”

Ende just shrugged in an over-exaggerated motion. I was a little bit irritated that their only worries seemed to be what they’d be eating for dinner.

“I don’t care, so long as I remain with Endymion.”

“I wish for Lady Melle to return to Phrasia. That is the consensus of my followers, as well.”

“...I can’t. I’m no longer your leader...”

Seemed like they were still at an impasse. They’d made no progress at all. Had they just sat around eating snacks? I was pretty irritated. Apparently the three Dominant Constructs, who were unfamiliar with food, found the experience quite novel. As a result, they were eating three square meals a day, and several snacks.

They didn’t take energy from calories like ordinary people, so it was entirely a pleasurable experience for them. It was just irritating because they asked for so much food every day. At first, they were eating even more than Yae. Every day. Each. We were going through

roughly ten cow's worth of steak every twenty-four hours. It wasn't sustainable.

After a while, they stopped eating so much, but the three of them were still eating enough for ten.

As far as I was concerned, these guys were freeloaders. They were eating free meals on my dime, and I wanted to kick them out... But it would've been bad if the wicked god got ahold of them, so I had no real choice.

I could have chosen not to feed them, but that would've been cruel.

"Much happening out there, Touya?"

"Not really, no. More mutant attacks in the Reverse World, though."

I shrugged and sat on the couch opposite Ende. The whole situation with the mutants felt like a termite infestation. You might not see any clear signs of an issue, but one day the whole house could just come crashing down.

"Have all the Phrase been absorbed by the mutants now, Ende?"

"The ones that Ney and the others brought are, yeah. I'd say there are around hundreds of thousands of them now... Consumed ones, I mean."

That's... a hell of a lot. I also remember hearing that Lesser Constructs could replicate themselves under the right conditions. Hopefully the mutants don't have a stronger version of that ability.

That meant I'd be getting no more Phrasium to use, though. I had a ton of it, but I needed to start being more conservative with it if the supply was finite.

Either way, it seemed like these guys were used to their lives in confinement. The Phrase had long lifespans, so they were probably used to being bored.

From what I'd heard, Melle had actually been borrowing books from Fam and reading them, though. Much like Elluka and Doctor Babylon, Melle could be considered a genius from her world. She had outstanding talent. She was the one who created the method that allowed the Phrase to cross between worlds in the first place. Looking at her hungrily chowing down snacks, I wouldn't be able to tell that at a glance. Seemed like there was really a fine line between genius and idiocy.

"Say, Touya... Can't you let me out a bit?"

"Moron, didn't I tell you? If Melle or the others leave this protective **[Prison]**, the mutants will be able to locate them. Are you trying to bring chaos to Brunhild?"

"No, of course not. I get the risk. I'm asking if you can let me out, not them."

Hm... I guess Ende isn't likely to abandon Melle or anything. I can easily change the settings to allow him to freely pass through... But what does he want to do, exactly?

"I want to train... I guess. I have a little bit of pride in me as a man, Touya. If those twins come back at me, I want to be strong enough to defeat them."

He was referring to the mutated duo that defeated him last time... It was irritating that we had Dominant Constructs on Yula's side.

Hmm... His eyes seem pretty honest. Guess he's upset he lost.

I didn't really care if he wanted to go out and get stronger. It'd only be a benefit to us.

“That’s the spirit, my boy!”

“Wh-What?!” Ende and I called out in confusion at the sudden, booming voice. A man appeared next to us in less than the blink of an eye. He looked to be around thirty. He had short hair and wore a white, sleeveless training costume that showed off his defined muscles. He had sharp, eagle-like eyes and thick bushy eyebrows. A bandana was wrapped around his head. There was no other way to describe him than... martial artist. He almost looked like a character from a fighting arcade game.

Given that he’d been able to breach this area meant he was no ordinary person.

“Wh-What... I-It’s you?!”

“You know this guy, Ende?”

“Y-Yes, I do! Wh-When I got the divine blades, h-he appeared and beat the snot out of me!”

“Nice to see you again, my boy!”

The martial artist laughed out loud. His booming voice was almost overbearing.

Wait... The one who beat up Ende...?!

“Are you... the god of combat?”

“That I am, son! I’ve descended to this world in a human body! Why? I’m glad you asked! It’s to make my boy Ende’s dreams come true!”

Seven gods? This is all getting a bit much. We’re at maximum god capacity already, thanks! What is this, some kind of lucky sevens deal? I don’t want it!

“I’m here now, my boy! Leave it all to me! I’ll etch the very meaning of battle into your body!”

Ende just stared blankly and pointed at himself in confusion, as if to ask whether the guy was actually talking to him or not.

God Almighty did mention something about him wanting to take on a new disciple... He'd probably been watching and waiting for a good moment to interject.

I felt bad for Ende, but it wasn't any of my business. The god of combat could do whatever he wanted with the guy. Ende wanted to get stronger, so it was perfect. He was going to be the disciple of this god, and that meant neither of them would bother me.

...It was a necessary sacrifice.



"It's me, ya boy Mochizuki Takeru! I'm Touya's uncle, so let's get along, sports!"

The god of combat... Or rather, uncle Takeru, laughed boisterously as he greeted the others. They just stared at him in stunned silence. To be honest, he could've easily passed as my elder brother, but Karen and Moroha refused. They said they'd rather die or go home than have a brother as irritating as he was. And so, he became my uncle. In short, he was taking on the role of the god of agriculture's younger brother.

"...He's your uncle, Touya? So that means he's... one of those, right?" Elze quietly whispered to me.

"Oh... Yeah... He is... He's the god of combat. He covers fighting, basically... Unarmed combat, martial arts... That kinda thing."

I saw the sparkles in Elze's eyes and realized I should not have said any of that, but it was too late. It was far too late. Elze immediately charged up to uncle Takeru and greeted him.

"Oho... Those are some well-used gauntlets. You're a battler like me, ain'tcha?"

“That’s right. I’m Elze, one of Touya’s fiancées. Can you teach me some new moves?”

“Fwahahahaaa! Amazing! Well, that makes you my niece! I’ll be training my disciple right after this, so you can sit in on our lesson!”

“Thank you!”

Augh... I guess I should’ve considered this. Yae and Hilde learned a lot from Moroha, but Elze fights in a totally different way, so it’s not like she learned all that much... It’s only obvious that a martial artist god would appeal to her from a training perspective. Well, Ende... good for you. You got yourself a sparring buddy.

“Feel free to train with him, just don’t overdo it.”

“I won’t. Thanks!”

Elze grinned as she bunched her hands into fists. She’d be fine, I was sure. Due to the fact that she was being influenced by my divinity like the others, I couldn’t imagine her getting hurt or anything.

“Alright, you two! First up is a special skill! It’s a special uppercut imbued with the power of a dragon! Who’s ready to sit under a waterfall?!”

“I am, I am!”

“U-Uh... I am, I guess...” Ende stared on, looking positively horrified. I wondered if he’d be alright, since he certainly didn’t look it.



Uncle Takeru put his hands on their shoulders, and they vanished into thin air. He'd probably warped them to some far-off waterfall. Even in a human body, he wasn't restrained by laws of logic.

"...Goodness me, Your Highness. I thought I'd gotten used to the sight, but your family is truly... Special." Prime Minister Kousaka stood there, shaking his head, obviously still reeling from the battle between Takeru and Moroha that he'd witnessed earlier.

Honestly, that duel was hard to describe. They clashed against each other like primal elemental forces. I was fairly sure that only I and the other gods could even catch their movements. They were going beyond the speed of sound. The match ended after Karina stepped in and notified the combatants that if they continued to fight they risked destroying the entire training field.

I couldn't understand how he deflected Moroha's sword attacks with just the cloth bindings on his hands... Sure they were dulled training swords, but... man, gods were scary.

"I wonder if she'll be okay..." Linze muttered quietly out of concern for her elder sister. Karen patted her on the shoulder with a smile.

"It'll be fine, you know? That guy might be a musclehead, but he knows about all the right care and consideration in training, you know? Elze will be fine."

"He's actually pretty sweet on chicks. On the flip-side... he's extra tough on dudes. If anything, I'm worried about the boy." Moroha butted in and finished Karen's explanation. The information she'd provided was a little unsettling, though.

...G-Good luck, Ende... Please come back breathing.

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"I never expected you to come down to the mortal world... But I guess it's not the first time you've shown up, huh?" Mochizuki Karina, god of the hunt, sat in a bar with a rugged-looking man, casually chattering to him.

"I mean, I'm just here to get the stolen weapon back! I guess I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a little interested in the new guy, though..."

The god of combat, or rather... Mochizuki Takeru, grinned a bit as he swilled the mug of ale in his hand.

"Mmh... This stuff's great! It's been a long time since I've tried mortal booze, but I must say I like it far more than sacred wine!"

"Nyahaha! That's the spirit, Takeru! I like it a bunch, too! Hic! Sacred wine's good and all for offering, but this kinda drink just can't be beat! There's more appeal in variety, and the mortal realm sure as hell has a ton of that, hic!"

The girl muttering to the older-looking man was none other than Mochizuki Suika, the perpetually drunk god of alcohol. She was laying on the ground next to Karina and Takeru.

The melodic sound of strings came from nearby, as Mochizuki Sousuke played the lute. Karina often came to see him play, as he was her brother in this world. He would frequently play music in the tavern at night, and many people came just to hear his tunes.

As the music continued to play in the background, a man appeared with a large tray in his hands. The tray had come from the tavern's kitchen and had an array of fresh dishes on it.

"Alright, s'done. Got a buncha heapins've cully rice, complete with my veggies! Oh, hey, uh... Takeru? Might be a little spicy fer your blood, but it should be good, aye?"

"Mm. Looks good to me."

The god of agriculture, Mochizuki Kousuke, placed a bowl of veggie cully and rice down in front of Takeru.

Takeru took his spoon and then brought a scoop of the meal to his mouth. His eyes shot open in shock.

“Amazing! Holy crap! This is delicious... Man, it’s so spicy! But it’s delicious! This force, such power! Hot diggity damn that is good stuff!”

“Heh... Glad you like it.” Kousuke smiled softly as Takeru continued to wolf down the meal. The god of combat couldn’t afford to lose in a fight, even if that fight was against spice. He continued shoveling the food into his mouth as his eyes watered.

Before long, his plate had been completely cleaned. He chugged down a fresh mug of ale and let out a thoroughly satisfied sigh.

“Whew! Food and booze, what more could a man ask for! Thanks, mortal realm!”

“Oh! You all got started without me, you know? You should’ve waited a little longer, you know?!”

“Ohh, looks good. Where’s my share?”

The last two members of the Brunhild pantheon walked into the bar. One was the cheery god of love, Mochizuki Karen. Following in her wake was Mochizuki Moroha, the god of swords.

There were seven of them in total. Seven gods, manifested in human form, eating and making merry.

“Let’s celebrate our union, then! Hic! Cheers!” Suika yelled out, prompting the others to clash their mugs together. Kousuke consulted the waitresses for additional snacks and drinks, while Moroha turned to Takeru.

“So... how are those two disciples of yours?”

“Mm... They’re pretty good! Ende has a lot of intuition going for him, while Elze has that kind of tenacity I can’t hate! Both of them taught me their own ways, and immediately took to the lessons I started imparting on them! I’m really looking forward to working with them... But aren’t we supposed to be supporting the newbie god? What’s up with that?”

“Ehh... I think by doing what we’re doing, we’re helping enough. Personally, I train Yae, Hilde, and the knight order. They end up adding to Touya’s power, so it’s good enough for me.”

“Mm... Guess that’s fine, then! God Almighty told me to help out as best I can, so I’ll keep on training those two!” Takeru said, grinning as he refilled his tankard once more.

“Just be careful. We’re primarily here to support Touya, so we can’t half-ass things all the time.”

“There’s no problem, you know?! Me and you, Moroha, we’re supporting him as his elder sisters, you know?!” Karen’s optimism overtook Moroha’s realism. For the most part, Karen was the vocal representative of the other gods, anyway. She often presided over his personal relationships and helped facilitate communication between people in Brunhild. In her own way, she was ensuring that things went smoothly for Touya as well.

“Plus, a lot of you guys just do as you please! Like you, Suika! All you do is drink, you know?!”

“H-Hey! It’s, hic, my job to be the cute little sister, right? Hic! I can drink all the time because I’m a mascot! I, hic, do emotionally supportive schtuff!”

“...Didn’t you vomit down the back of Touya’s neck? What’s emotionally supportive about that?”

“Ghh... How’d you find out about thaaat?” Suika grumbled to herself, poured some Eashenese sake, and drank some more. Her face was red, but booze wasn’t the only reason.

Even though she was the god of alcohol, she didn’t have the chance to drink all that often. She was making the most of her chance to drink freely. During that particular incident, she’d had more booze than she was comfortable with, and couldn’t hold back the sudden rush of puke. Given that she was the god of alcohol, it was a matter of personal shame that she couldn’t hold her liquor.

Kousuke suddenly spoke up, breaking the awkward air.

“Now, now... We’re all on standby, ain’t we? We just got a lotta free time right now, so it ain’t a big deal. No shame in relaxing now and then, right?”

As if responding to Kousuke’s comment, Sousuke began playing a more gentle, relaxing tune. It was a famous song that had been covered by various artists and helped set the mood for the situation at large.

Ultimately, it was up to Touya to actually face down the wicked god. The gods themselves were only here to support him. Even if they were taking human form, it would be no good if they defeated the wicked god on Touya’s behalf. Otherwise, he’d learn nothing. It’d be like a parent stepping in on a child’s feud, and beating up the bully themselves.

“If Touya loses to the wicked god, this world’ll get nixed by the god of destruction, right? I’d prefer it if we could avoid that outcome.”

“That’s why we’re helping him by training the people who matter to him. Plus, I wouldn’t underestimate him, in all honesty... He’s favored by God Almighty, too... I don’t think he’ll go down so

easy..." Moroha seemed to have confidence in her surrogate brother.

"Mm... Gotta be careful not to let confidence turn into arrogance, though. I'm pretty impressed by his capabilities, though. I think the lad has some fine combat stuff going on."

The god of combat nodded as he munched down on some red meat. From his perspective, Touya was pretty lucky to have the support he'd been given. The people he'd encountered in his journey so far were a blessing for the boy, and he was probably aware of it.

"Touya's made a lot of enemies, but he's made some excellent friends, you know? He's even got the support of some excellent girls... I know that one, in particular, takes all his trouble in stride, you know?"

"Yumina? Yeah, she's a good one. Helps that she can read people's intentions, too... She's one of the greatest companions he could've met."

Moroha and Karen started talking amongst each other. There were people who had malicious intentions, who wanted to use Touya's status for their own social gain. But Yumina's mystic eye put a stop to them before they even got close.

Thanks to that, it was easy to tell that Touya was surrounded by good people. But it was still possible for people to change... In the meantime, though, Yumina put concerns of mistrust to rest.

The other eight fiancées were also capable in their own ways and could do things Touya wouldn't possibly be able to achieve on his own. He was lucky to have them.

"So we don't really have to help too much, do we? Seems he has the support of some great humans as it is."

“Nope. A world of humans is best left to humans, in the end. We can jus’ keep on bein’ subtle with helpin’ the lad...” Kousuke quickly followed up on Karina’s postulation.

“Well then, let’s just celebrate for now! Touya’s gonna be fine, so let’s take it easy and help him when he needs us!”

“Cheers to that!” The seven gods wished good fortune to the budding newbie they’d been called to help. The divine in mortal flesh, invigorated by their good evening together, pledged to support him in any way they could.



Interlude III: Right by Your Side

“Haaah!” Moroha jumped to the side and just barely avoided Jutaro’s wooden sword. It was a subtle motion, and she managed it at the last second, but the sidestep she made was pretty impressive.

Jutaro was undeterred, however, and came at her again with a blow from below. But even that was easily avoided.

She could read all of his movements. I wasn’t too surprised. She hadn’t triggered her Apotheosis, but her abilities were still far beyond human.

“Gh!”

Jutaro thrust his weapon toward Moroha’s throat, but she shifted to the side again. He found himself only striking thin air.

“Don’t neglect your legs.”

“Uwah?!”

A thud rang out as Moroha swept Jutaro’s legs. He was knocked off-balance, and quickly tried to readjust his posture. Moroha made her move once he was distracted by his own motions.

It happened in a flash. With speed invisible to the naked eye, Moroha brought her sword crashing into Jutaro’s stomach. He was blasted backward and collapsed. His wooden sword whooshed out of his hand.

“Was that... two strikes...? Or three...?”

“Mmm... I could barely see it, I could not.”

Hilde and Yae murmured to each other. It seemed like they were unable to comprehend the vast number of attacks that had just unfolded.

“Guhhh...!”

Jutaro stood himself up and charged toward Moroha once more, his posture looking different from before. *Wait... I've seen Yae do that before.*

“Kokonoe Secret Style: Flying Swallow Rend!”

The tip of his blade danced as he jumped forward, aiming a graceful strike at Moroha's shoulder.

“You're still too slow.”

Moroha simply shook her head and sidestepped the attack. She then used Jutaro's own momentum against him, slamming her sword into the side of his neck.

“Hngh!” Jutaro fell to his knees in front of her, his wooden blade on the ground beside him.

...How scary. If that was a real fight, he'd have been decapitated.

“You've still got much to learn.”

“Jutaro-sama!”

As Moroha let her weapon rest, someone cried out and ran toward the defeated man. It was Ayane, the Kokonoe family servant. She'd come along for a visit with Jutaro.

Jutaro was completely beaten. He didn't even have the strength to raise his head, but the shame-filled glance he aimed at Ayane before passing out stood out as strange to me.

“Geez... Didn't you go a little hard on him?”

“He's fine. I'm hardly gonna beat him within an inch of his life. He'll open his eyes in no time.”

Moroha shrugged in response to my words. Beating a man unconscious still seemed pretty bad in my eyes, though.

I walked over and cast **[Cure Heal]** on Jutaro, along with **[Refresh]** for good measure.

“Dang it... Kohaku? Take Jutaro to the medical center.”

“As you wish.”

Kohaku transformed into her beast form, and I lifted the still-unconscious Jutaro on to her back. Ayane anxiously followed them both.

Moroha casually spoke to me as she watched them leave.

“He’s getting better, you know? He might even catch up to me one of these days. I can feel a pretty burning desire from him. It’s a strong will to get stronger. But he’s also kinda desperate...”

“He is impatient, he is... Mmm... I wonder if he is troubled, I do...” Yae mumbled and folded her arms. She was worried about her brother. Yae cared a lot for her family, so I wasn’t surprised.

Yae’s brother, Jutaro, was visiting us for the day. He had won the fighting tournament we’d put on a while ago. But then in the exhibition match afterward, he lost to Moroha.

Today, he’d come in an attempt to regain some of that lost honor. But he’d been defeated yet again. That was plain as day. The gulf between them was way too vast. Moroha was the god of swords, so it was kind of hard to even come close to her on her own turf. Though, to be honest, I think Jutaro was more interested in learning from her than just winning.

Still, I couldn’t help but feel bad. Ayane had come from Eashen with him, and she watched him get beat down pretty roughly... I could see the panic on her face, so I felt a little bad about letting Moroha go so far.

“I have never seen brother lose so badly, I have not. There are only a few people in Oedo stronger than my brother, there are.”

Heh... Well, I guess Jutaro is pretty tough by mortal standards. It's not really fair to judge him against a literal god. Especially not one that can be such a no-good bully...

"Were you thinking something rude just now?"

"No! Not at all."

Moroha was sharp as ever.

"...I will go and see how my brother is doing, I will."

"Oh, I'll come as well."

I felt like even if he had something seriously wrong with him, Flora would be able to deal with it. I headed from the training grounds with Yae and walked through the castle until we reached the medical center. Jutaro was on a bed in the corner of the chalk-white room, breathing slowly.

Flora was there, dressed in her usual nurse getup, and Ayane was sitting uneasily by his bedside. Kohaku was also there, in her tiny form. She was curled up on the bed next to him.

"Ahh, Master. He is fine, you see. He has just fainted, you see?"

"I see. That's good to know."

...Guess Moroha was right, then. Probably shouldn't have doubted her.

"I am sorry that this has happened..."

"What do you mean? My brother has no restraint in matters like this, he does not. It was his own decision."

Ayane bowed her head to Yae and apologized, but Yae simply shook her head. She was probably upset about inconveniencing everyone. But in the end, Yae's family was my family, and I wouldn't consider something like this a bother.

“My brother has been acting strangely today, he has... Has something happened, has it?”

Ayane reacted with silence, only stopping to glance nervously in Jutaro’s direction. It seemed like something had happened, but I certainly had no idea what. We left Jutaro behind and walked out to the courtyard garden outside the castle.

This area was considered Cesca’s domain, and she treated it with as much care as she did Babylon’s garden. It wasn’t exactly as teeming with life, but it was a comfortable and relaxing place to hang out. It honestly irritated me that such a stupid, perverted maid had such hydroponic talent. She’d even been personally praised for her horticulture by Uncle Kousuke. Given that he was the god of agriculture, that wasn’t a casual compliment. Then again, she’d probably been specifically engineered to tend to plants.

Yae and I sat with Ayane in the courtyard and asked her what was going on with Jutaro.

“Recently, Jutaro-sama has been lost in thought almost every day... When I ask about it, he simply tells me everything is fine... I wonder if he has some kind of deep trouble that he cannot talk to me about...”

“My brother seems that troubled, he does? Hmm... Perhaps he is frustrated after hitting a roadblock in his pursuit of sword mastery...” Yae folded her arms together and tilted her head. If it was a problem with his swordplay, then obviously he wouldn’t want to bother Ayane with it. But still, I wondered just what his issue was...

If he was troubled by his swordplay reaching its peak, then I hoped that his loss against Moroha wouldn’t deepen that unease. I didn’t exactly want him to lose faith in himself.

“U-Uhm, Your Highness? G-Grand Duke? I-It may be terribly impolite of me to ask, but could you ask Jutaro-sama about his troubles?! As I understand it, men have an easier time talking to men...”

“Me? I mean... I guess if it’s just listening to him... I dunno if he’ll want to talk, though.”

To be honest, if he had issues with swordplay, I was hardly suited to giving him advice. I didn’t exactly have much in the way of swordplay.

But... if he was going to be my brother-in-law... I figured it’d be good to hear him out if he had a problem.

I left the two of them behind in the courtyard and headed back to the doctor’s office.

When I got back, the guy was awake in his bed. Flora was holding a smartphone over him, taking a few candid shots of his forehead. Or at least, that’s what it looked like she was doing.

Flora’s mass-produced smartphone had the added ability to look through things, much like an x-ray scan. It was a function granted by enchanting the device with my **[Long Sense]** spell and had great medical applications.

“There’s no problem with him, you see. He’s the picture of health!”

“I’m in your debt...”

He bowed to Flora and smiled, but his expression immediately shifted to a pensive one.

I asked Flora to step aside for a bit and took a seat next to his bed. He looked a little discouraged, but that didn’t seem to be the problem most prominently on his mind.

"Jutaro... I know you're not feeling well, but is there anything on your mind?" I decided to just ask him directly. For a while, he made a face like he didn't know what to say, but eventually, he just turned and started muttering.

"Uhm... Well... Ahh... C-Can I tell you a story about a friend?!"

"...Sure."

A story about a friend? I don't buy that for a second. Man... I asked you straight, and you're gonna beat around the bush?

"This friend of mine... is in love with a woman, you see... But the woman will soon have a formal marriage interview, and be married off elsewhere... S-So, you see..."

"Huh?!"

"Wh-What is it?"

"...Nothing. Please continue."

A formal marriage interview?! For real?! Wait... if the guy in this story is actually Jutaro, then... is the girl Ayane? Is that why you looked at her like that earlier... Wait, is Ayane getting married off?!

"The person this woman is set to marry is the successor of one of the richest clothing traders in Oedo. The family is quite enthusiastic to take her in and would like her to be married by the end of this year... And I, er... Ahem, my friend... is understandably upset, but he feels it is not his place to step in."

"W-W-Wait a second! How can he just give up like that?"

"It is a matter of social standing... The man who will marry her is the head of a household, and a rich merchant. My friend, however... is a lowly soldier. Even if he was in good standing with Ieyasu-sama, he is not of noble blood. It is clear as day that the woman would be happier if she married into the wealthy family."

Hmm... I guess I can understand the concerns here... It's true that the Kokonoe family is highly praised and respected in Oedo, and they even work directly with Ieyasu himself... but the family honor lies with Jutarō's father, not Jutarō.

Not to mention the fact that the position wasn't exactly fixed, even if they worked for Ieyasu, there was no guarantee his successor would keep them on. Jutarō could wait until his father passed, but there was no guarantee he'd come to head the family and the family would have the same level of importance by the time that came about. It wasn't like he could just change the house he served, either.

Well, technically he could. Jutarō won the Brunhild contest, and many mighty contenders from Eashen were in attendance. If he introduced himself to anyone that saw him, they'd probably consider taking him on... But that probably wasn't a real option either.

"So, for the happiness of the woman... he believes he should stay away from the situation. At least, that's what my friend says."

Yeah, I get it... You're thinking about her happiness because you don't want to ruin things for her. It was the same for me. When I decided to marry Yae and the others, I wanted to be sure that I could provide for them, and actually make them happy...

Suddenly, out of nowhere...

Shit!

"Love! Solutions! Decisions! Justice! Let's connect the red string of fate, you know?! Have no fear, Mochizuki Karen is heere!"

"Wh... Where did you come from?!"

"Ghh..."

Karen appeared, striking a ridiculously flashy pose. She was also winking. I hated it. She must've teleported in from somewhere else. I was a fool to think even the smallest whiff of a love story would go

by unnoticed in her territory. I wondered just how many Brunhild locals had been subjected to her meddling.

“Where did you come from?”

“That’s a stupid question, you know? Wherever there are love troubles, there is Mochizuki Karen, you know?!”

Jutaro stared at Karen in a mixture of blank confusion and disbelief.

“U-Uhm...”

“You don’t need to say a thing, you know? Leave it all to me! Touya and Yae have been helped big-time by my incredible advice! It’s proven! Tried and tested!”

Hm...? Seems like that got his attention. She’s not exactly lying... She has been helpful here and there when it comes to my love life.

“...Well, if he must.”

“Hey, Touya! Don’t act like I’m forcing him into anything, you know?! Hmmp!” Karen grumbled loudly. Since she was the god of love, I always figured she’d be a little more professional... But she always came across like some kind of tacky gossip. I wasn’t entirely convinced she’d be able to help in this situation.

There had been cases where love didn’t bloom even after people consulted with her, after all. But Karen always said that failed romances were never failures, and you just need to learn from them to make the next love even stronger. Frankly, I didn’t see the point in resisting her any longer. She had her eyes set on the prize, so we just had to go along with it.

I didn’t exactly feel great about it, but consulting the god of love was worth a shot at least.

“So... what should we do here?”

“Love is a battle, you know?! First thing’s first, know thy enemy! Then, plan your attack!”

She’d caught me off-guard there. That was surprisingly decent advice. It was definitely true that you couldn’t do much without knowing anything about the other side. A little bit of early investigation would serve us well.

“So, Jutaro... what kind of person is the clothing merchant guy?”

“Oh... Well... I have not much interest in clothes, so I am unsure.”

Hm... Even if Ayane and that guy get married, I wouldn’t want her to be with a person who was unpleasant or cruel.

I decided that we needed to figure out what kind of guy this merchant was.

Alright... For the sake of Jutaro, Ayane, and love! Let’s get snooping!



“So? Did you find anything out?”

“Yes, we did.” Three girls were kneeling before me and Yae. They were my special ninjas, serving directly under Tsubaki. Sarutobi Homura, Kirigakure Shizuku, and Fuma Nagi.

It had been a few days since I’d given them their mission. I asked them to look into the young heir of the clothing merchant family. I wanted to know about his personality, his reputation, rumors about him, and who he was friends with.

Basically, I’d sent them to do some basic information gathering.

“To start with, his name is Surugaya Ichinose. He’s twenty-six years old, and is the successor to the Surugaya Outlet.”

Shizuku began speaking first. *Twenty-six, huh? Jutarō is twenty-two, if I remember right... And Ayane is twenty. That's a little bit of an age gap, but it's not all that bad. Single men around that age are pretty common in Eashen, I think. Women usually get married before or around Ayane's age, though.*

"From what I uncovered in town, there are no bad rumors about him at all. Apparently he is the studious type and has a hard-working demeanor. He even avoids indulging in things like drinking and gambling."

"And his appearance?"

"One moment."

My smartphone suddenly vibrated, and Yae took out hers as well. We'd both received a message. The sender was Shizuku, and a picture was attached.

"Hm... He looks very polite, he does... A gentle, easygoing face, he has..."

Yae was right. The image showed a calm-looking young man. He had a soft, smiling face and wore a casual, well-made uniform. So this was Jutarō's rival...

"But even if he looks nice, maybe there's something darker under the surface... Did you find anything like that?"

"Nooope... He's a good guy through-and-throuuuugh... He was pleasant even when he discovered Homuraaa..."

"Wh— You idiot! They do not need to know about that!"

...He did what, now?

"I... I was in disguise and watching him from the top of a tree... But my eyelids were drooping, and... I regret to say that I fell asleep..."

"You fell from the top of the tree right next to him, Homuraaa..."

“...Oh geez.”

What kind of ninja falls asleep on top of their target?

“Please forgive me...”

“Even though she was toootally suspicious, the guy just asked if she was okay and checked her for injurieees. He has to be a good persooon.”

Apparently Homura responded to his queries with a moment of concussed confusion. She just saluted at him and vanished into thin air, then he went about his day.

Ugh... This is irritating. Why is he nice? Aren't the villains supposed to be irredeemable and gross? If he was an abuser or some kind of corrupt merchant, that'd be one thing, but...

“Oh, there was one thing that came up, though.”

“Mm?” Shizuku noticed Yae and I grumbling and quickly gave us a final piece of information.

“Apparently he is searching for a cloth made from Fire-Rat pelt. According to our intel, the person he's been betrothed to desperately wants one.”

“A Fire-Rat?”

“It is a monster, natively known as the Fire-Rat in Eashen. Most adventurers know them as Burning Rats. They are typically found in the volcanic regions of Eashen... You can also find them in the desert regions of what was once Sandora.”

Oh... Those things? Now I remember. It's a large rat with a flaming tail, and it employs the flames in combat. It was around the size of a large dog, if I recalled correctly.

Well... I only recalled seeing it in the guild's bestiary. I had never seen it in person.

But why would Ayane want that...?

“The pelt of a Burning Rat is pure white and completely resistant to fire. You can clean it perfectly by immersing it in flames. It’s a really valuable material and isn’t often found on the market. Burning Rats are difficult to hunt due to their dwindling population and relative strength.”

Plain white fur...? Does she want to incorporate it into a wedding dress, or something?

“So he wants to present it to her to get the marriage rolling?”

“Yes. He is sparing no expense in the matter, and is looking for any possible lead on the pelt.”

“Hmm... But if he gets it, then the wedding will be brought forward, it will... Why would Ayane want that, why would she?” Yae folded her arms together and sighed. I was equally confused.

Ayane was the daughter of a landowner who moved to Oedo in order to study under Yae’s family... If she married, then she’d have to leave everyone she knew behind. Why would she be eager to get the marriage underway?

Fire-Rat cloth... Hm... Cloth... Fire-Rat... Why does that sound so familiar to me?

“Oh!”

Of course! I pulled out my smartphone to look it up, and the first page told me everything I needed to know.

The robe of the Fire-Rat was an integral part of the story of Princess Kaguya, from the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter! In the story, Princess Kaguya was approached by five princes who wished to marry her. She said she’d marry them if they fulfilled her impossible tasks, involving finding treasures that couldn’t be found.

The robe of the Fire-Rat was one of those impossible treasures. Perhaps asking for a Fire-Rat cloth was Ayane's indirect way of refusing the proposal.

"Yae... Do you know the story of Princess Kaguya?"

"Kaguya? I do not... Which country has a princess named Kaguya, Touya-dono?"

"Oh. What about you guys?"

I turned to the three ninjas, and they shook their heads. I was a little surprised, but reasonably I had no reason to be. It was a story from Earth, in the end. I needed to remember that I was only speaking and understanding the people around me thanks to the influence of God Almighty. It was entirely possible that me hearing such linguistic similarities was entirely coincidence based on my subjective understanding. Translation was a difficult art, after all.

But even so... it was possible that Ayane was rejecting the proposal with an impossible demand, just like Princess Kaguya did.

And in that case... Jutaro still had a chance!



"Let's get a Fire-Rat cloth."

"I don't really know where to find that..."

Jutaro was training at Oedo castle when I swung by to see him with Yae. He was studious as ever...

"It's one of the demands made by the young woman, the one your friend was pining after."

"Huh?! Ayan— Ahem... Th-The young woman, you say?"

"That's right. The girl you...r friend is in love with. I think she's issued such a difficult challenge as an excuse to refuse his proposal. She probably can't outright say no due to social obligations, but if

she makes such an unreasonable demand with a straight face, then it would be a plausible way to reject him.”

“An excuse to refuse him...?”

I saw a small sliver of happiness appear on Jutaro’s face, but we had no time to slack off. We had to actually put the work in.

“So why don’t we get the Fire-Rat cloth first? Beat the guy to the punch. If we did that, then the talks would be stretched out much longer and she might not even marry the other guy. Plus, your friend could give it to her and use it as a chance to profess his feelings.”

“Oh, but... isn’t it something that’s incredibly hard to find?”

“Brother... Touya-dono is capable of teleportation and searching magic, he is. We already know where to find one, we do. The rest is up to you, it is.”

Yae spoke to her apprehensive brother in a firm tone. She stared him straight in the eyes, the determined flames dancing along her expression. He finally relented beneath her gaze.

“Very well, then. Let us go.”

Alright, about time! Yae and I looked at each other with a grin.

“Oh... W-Well, I’ll do it for the sake of my friend! Yes, my dear friend! I’ll help him out, this time! Aha...”

...Both Yae and my own expressions soured a little, and we let out a pair of sighs... Still, we shook our heads and carried onward, regardless.

“Alright! Let’s get a Fire-Rat cloth for the sake of Jutaro and Ayane. Then, Jutaro can finally tell her how he feels!”

“Yeah! Wait... What?!”

“Heh, too late. You already agreed.”

“...You are a terrible liar, you are... Please learn to weave stories better.”

Yae simply shrugged her shoulders in resignation. Frankly, I felt the exact same way. The two of them were so stupidly honest by nature that you could tell they were related.

“N-No! Of course not! I am in no position to tell Ayane who to marry!”

“...C’mon, cut the nonsense already. Like Yae said, you’re no good at lying. We’re either doing this, or we’re not. Personally, I think if you give up here, you’ll only come to regret it later.”

Jutaro went quiet for a while, but eventually, he spoke up with nervous conviction.

“...I will do it, then. I do not wish for any regrets.”

He turned to us with serious eyes. I was just glad he finally admitted he was talking about himself.

“Touya-dono, open us a **[Gate]**. We will head toward this Burning Rat, we will.”

“No problem.” I cast my spell, and a portal of light opened up. We passed through the other side into a rocky, burning environment. We were in a mountainous area connected to the Rabbi Desert, known as the Tecracala Gorge.

The ground itself was a reddish-brown in this place, kind of like the Grand Canyon back on Earth. I could only really see dust and rocks, with the odd plant here or there. I looked around more closely and saw something white. It was an animal skeleton. I wondered if it was a skeleton that belonged to a Burning Rat... Whatever it was, it was rare. That meant it was mine for the taking.

“Now I just gotta look up the precise locations...” I searched for Burning Rats with my smartphone. I decided to add in a few parameters to the search. I wanted the largest possible one.

“Got it. It’s not too far, so let’s walk over.”

Yae and Jutaro were fairly hardened fighters, so they’d be fine in a place like this. We began walking toward the place that was outlined on the map. We clambered over rocks and continued over the rough terrain. I thought just because the target was close in terms of distance, it’d be easy... but I was wrong.

I suggested using **[Fly]**, but Yae immediately vetoed that suggestion. What a pain...

“It’s supposed to be around here...”

“I do not see it, I do not...”

I looked around the place, but couldn’t see much. There were massive boulders around the place, so it was hard to see.

“Hm?”

“What’s up?”

Jutaro suddenly crouched down and brought his hand to the sword hilt. We followed suit.

“...The air is warmer around there. Is the Burning Rat around, perhaps?”

Jutaro pointed toward one of the massive boulders. He said it was warmer... But frankly, the whole place was warm to me. I checked the map, and it actually did correlate with Jutaro’s instincts.

The Burning Rat’s tail was always aflame, so it would make sense for the air to be hotter where it is. That seemed pretty obvious in retrospect. Just as I thought that to myself, something leaped out in front of us.

From the shadow of a massive boulder came an equally massive white rodent. It was a Burning Rat, that much was for sure, but the size was not at all what I expected. The guild's bestiary had me assuming it'd be around the size of a dog. However, this Burning Rat was clearly the size of a large elephant. Clearly someone was measuring wrong when he recorded information about the species!

"Kyikyikyaaaaah!" The Burning Rat's entire body suddenly shuddered and lit up with flames. It had immediately designated us as hostile.

The Burning Rat shook its body, sending several flaming projectiles into the air.

"Look out!"

Yae and Jutaro spread out on my command. The projectiles landed exactly where we were, exploding on contact with the ground.

"Touya-dono! Is this the Burning Rat, is it?!"

"The size is off, but yeah, I think so! This one might be a Behemoth, I dunno!"

If this thing was left alive a few more years, it'd probably end up being terrifyingly huge. We'd end up needing a Frame Gear to take care of it.

To be honest, this thing was so large that the young merchant probably couldn't have used his vast fortune to take care of it. In that regard, we were pretty lucky.

"Alright, guess I'll use my Water magic to subdue it, and then..."

"Excuse me, Grand Duke... Could you leave it to me?"

"Huh?"

I shrugged, then watched as Jutaro charged toward the Burning Rat. This monster was definitely at least on the level of a silver adventurer. It wouldn't be an easy victory...

I was about to warn him, but I found Yae tugging on my sleeve. *...Alright, I get it. It's something he wants to do for Ayane. I'll let him tough it out alone.*

"Alright, fine! Go fight it alone! But if you get in serious trouble, I'm stepping in!"

"Very well! Thank you! I feel as though if I can take down this creature, I may be able to pass the barrier that I have reached in my training!"

Jutaro earnestly pointed his blade at the Burning Rat. To be honest, I still felt uneasy about his chances. Jutaro, like most people in Eashen, had no magical aptitude at all. All he had to defend himself was his swordplay.

In other words, he had no magical means to supplement his physical skills. He had nothing but his own finesse to face off against the huge Burning Rat. Just watching the scene unfold had me a little nervous.

I thought of at least supporting him with magic, but Yae stopped me.

"...The opponent may be a monster, it may... But my brother considers this a true duel, he does. That is why you cannot use any of your magic to help him, you cannot. This must be a fair fight."

I understood what she was saying. My magic would tip the scales way too much. But still, if it looked like he was about to die, I'd definitely intervene. I wasn't going to entertain any samurai honor nonsense at that point.

"Kyikyaaaah!"

“Hmph!” Jutaro just barely avoided the monster and its burning claws. He swerved his body to the right and retaliated by slashing its right foreleg.

“Kyih?!”

It was a shallow wound. That certainly could’ve gone better. But he couldn’t get too close, since the flames billowing from its body were too intense.

Eashenese samurai used their swords to make clean, precise cuts. He was at a disadvantage against such a large monster, especially one with active area denial. Even if he managed to get a good slash in on the rat, it wasn’t likely he’d do enough to critically wound it. He also risked dulling the blade if it happened too many times.

Jutaro understood that, surely.

The fight raged on between the two of them, with Jutaro taking a defensive position. The Burning Rat spewed forth more fireballs from its fur, making Jutaro stumble here and there.

“Kyiiiiiaah!”

“Ngh?!”

The beast suddenly opened its mouth, stood on its hind legs, and let loose a billowing torrent of fire. *It can breathe fire like a Dragon?!*

Jutaro responded to the attack by leaping to the left and hiding behind a boulder. He was definitely getting worn out. It was hot enough just passively, and the added heat from the monster was clearly doing little for his fatigue. If he got tired, then his speed and strength would fall as well. He needed to pull out.

“Yae.”

“Not yet, Touya-dono. My brother has not given up, he has not. I look forward to seeing how this goes, I do. He is reaching for his victory...”

Yae was staring at the fight, clearly transfixed. She believed in him. She believed that her brother could win, no matter what.

...And so did I. Even if I was worried, I wanted to share in Yae’s conviction. Jutaro could win this. He had to do it for Ayane.

“Kiyaaaaaah!”

The Burning Rat prepared another breath attack. Jutaro, seeing an opportunity, charged out at full pelt. I had no idea what the madman was doing. He dashed across the ground faster than the flames could move and kicked off a nearby rock. The motion spring boarded him into the air.

“Kokonoe Secret Style: Hornet Jabber!” Jutaro yelled out, and he dug his blade into the monster’s throat. He kept the sword running until he’d gutted the Burning Rat from neck to belly.

Were you aiming there this whole time?!

“Kyiiiih!”

The Burning Rat squealed as blood pooled from its mouth. It fell over, dead. Then, its flames slowly began to fade out, until there weren’t any left on its body at all. All that remained was an oversized rodent.

He’d won.

“Ngh... Hhh... Gh...” Jutaro fell to his knees, breathing heavily. He looked positively exhausted.

“Brother!”

“...Do not worry. I am okay. I have done as I intended...”

Jutaro smiled at his sister, but he certainly didn't look alright. I wondered if he just wanted to look cool in front of Yae.

I quickly cast **[Refresh]** and **[Mega Heal]** on the poor guy. His injuries were healed, and he caught his breath again. I tossed the Burning Rat carcass into **[Storage]**. The people at the guild would be able to skin it and take it apart much better than I could.

Once we had the material, we'd be able to sell the rest of it. Though, I heard that Burning Rat meat wasn't all that tasty, so it probably wouldn't fetch a high market price. That was a shame, but it was just one of those things.

"Now, all you have to do is tell Ayane your feelings."

"Ahaha... Somehow, that feels more formidable a task than slaying this rat..."

Jutaro's face went red, and I didn't think it was just from the heat. I could certainly understand his feelings in that regard... Confessing was scary.

But either way, there was no escaping it. Not if you wanted the person you love right by your side, anyway.



"One Fire-Rat cloth, as ordered."

"Ohh! This is splendid, it is!"

A few days later, we were at Fashion King Zanak's Brunhild branch, picking up the finished product we'd commissioned. Zanak had worked wonders with the material, creating a beautiful white cloth. It looked pristine.

The Fire-Rat cloth could be cleansed of dirt in flame due to the fact that it had incredible resistance and insulation against fire. In terms of adventuring equipment, it was top-notch. The processing

made it shrink a bit, but that wasn't an issue given how big the creature was.

After Zanak handed it over, I felt the softness in my hands... It was hard not to want to run my hands all over it. *Ohh... This is nice... This is really nice...*

I resisted the sudden, strong urge to rub it up against my face. I didn't want to smother myself in Ayane's gift, after all.

"Are you fine with me keeping the rest of it?"

"Sure. That should cover the costs of making it."

"Thank you so much! Accessories we make with its pelt should sell well..."

Even if there was only a small portion of the pelt left, that was relative. The monster itself was massive, so I was sure that Zanak would be able to create earmuffs or cloth pouches from the rest. He'd definitely make a lot of cash from that.

It was pretty costly to process the Burning Rat's pelt because it was a material that could only be suitably handled by the best of the best. I said I'd pay for it, but Jutaro refused. And that was when Zanak came in with a compromise. He said he'd process and stitch it all together for us, in exchange for the rest of the pelt. Thank goodness for his shrewd business sense...

"Brother, you must take this to Ayane, you must. There is no time to waste, there is not!"

"R-Right!"

Jutaro took the Fire-Rat cloth, which had been neatly placed into a paper bag, thanked Zanak, and ran out of the store. I opened up a **[Gate]** to the Kokonoe Dojo back in Oedo, and we stepped through.

Yae walked to her house and went to find Ayane. There were only a few students in the dojo, but Yae and Jutaro's mother, Nanae,

was back at the house. Confessing while she was there would be awkward, which was why we wanted to call Ayane out.

Jutaro started fidgeting and breathing heavily.

“Guuuh...”

“Just relax, man. Talk to her like you usually would.”

“Wh-What?! How can I act casually at a time like this?! T-Tell me, Grand Duke! How do you do it? H-How did you handle Yae?”

Huh? Me and Yae? Well, uh...

“...There was a duel involved.”

“That does not help at all!”

Yeah... My case was definitely an outlier. I think in Jutaro's case, he's just gotta tell her straight.

Yae suddenly came charging back toward the dojo alone, prompting the already panicky Jutaro to get even more concerned.

“Th-This is bad, it is! Ayane was called to the storefront of the man she is to be betrothed to, she was! She is headed there now, she is!”

“Wh—?!”

The moment he heard that, Jutaro went charging out the door. He was fast! We followed after him, running through the streets at full pelt, turning corner after corner. After what felt like five minutes of full running, we came out in the middle of a bustling city street.

Jutaro continued running down the street until he saw the person he was looking for.

“Ayane!”

“Hm...? Oh... Jutaro-sama? And... Yae-sama? A-And the grand duke?! Wh-What is going on?” Ayane just stared at us in confusion, clutching a bag in her hands.

Jutaro had charged all this way to see her so he was completely out of breath, and people in the surrounding area were looking at us suspiciously. Having him confess like this was just unfair.

“Sorry, I’m gonna move us someplace better.”

“Huh?”

I opened up a **[Gate]** beneath us, moving only us four to another place. It was a quiet, forested area outside Oedo. It was the place I’d first landed in when I came to Eashen.

We stepped out into a forest with a large camphor tree, under which there was a torii arch with a hokora shrine, protected by two lion-dog statues.

“E-Eh? H-Huh? This is... the town’s shrine grove?”

“A-Ayane! There’s something I want to tell you!”

“Y-Yes?!”

Jutaro’s sudden proclamation startled all of us, but it also made Ayane drop the bag she was holding. And that bag spilled open, revealing a soft-looking, white material...

“Oh no! It got dirty! Oh wait, that is fine...”

“A-Ayane... Wh-What is that...?”

“Oh, this? It is the cloth of a Fire-Rat... They say you can clean anything made of Fire-Rat fur if you throw it into a fire... A-Are you okay?”

Jutaro’s face was as pale as the cloth. *Oof. Sorry, man...*

“Ayane. Did you receive that as a gift from the man who wishes to marry into your family, did you?”

“Huh? Yae-dono? How did you know that? Y-Yes, you are correct. Though, I honestly did not expect him to find it... I was quite surprised.”

Ayane laughed softly, which made Jutaro’s expression shift to one of misery. *Were we too late...? Why’s she looking so happy, anyway? If it’s a reluctant marriage, then shouldn’t she be looking a little more disappointed? Although... I guess we never bothered looking into Ayane’s feelings, did we?*

“My sister will be delighted when she sees it. I must get this to her right away.”

“...What now?”

HOLD UP. Get this to who? Your sister? Why would you need to... Don’t tell me...

“Uhm... Ayane? By any chance, is your sister marrying some good-looking guy who’s the successor to a clothing merchant household?”

“Yes, she is! Did you hear about it?”

“Whaaaaaat?!”

Ayane’s eyes widened as the three of us yelled out in exasperation. *What the hell?! That’s not the story I was told at all! Jutaro, you idiot!*

“Jutaro! What’s the big deal here?!”

“Oh, I... I heard about it from my colleagues in the bar!” *It was just hearsay?! You dumbass! They clearly got Ayane confused with her sister! Are you kidding me right now?!*

“So this was all a big misunderstanding, it was... This feels like a bad joke, it does.”

I exhaled and pinched the bridge of my nose. So did Yae. I could understand her feelings. Even though we'd struggled so much, we didn't even need to. *What was that one Aesop's fable about great efforts yielding little? The mountain had labored and brought forth a mouse? Yeah, that's definitely appropriate for this situation! Except the mouse was a goddamn rat, and it was mountain-sized!*

"Um... Is everything okay?" Ayane looked over at us with concern on her face. Things were definitely not okay.

I just shook my head. However, Jutaro stepped forward and approached Ayane once more.

"Ayane, please look here." Jutaro reached into his paper bag and pulled out the Fire-Rat cloth. It was obvious that it was bigger and far higher in quality than the one Ayane had.

"H-Huh? Jutaro-dono?"

"...I got this for you. For the same reason the young merchant got one for your sister..."

"What...?" Ayane gazed from the cloth to Jutaro with a stunned look on her face.

"That... Well, if it's okay with you... I'd like you to stay... Stay by my side, always."

"Jutaro-sama... I, well..."

"I-I want you to be my wife, Ayane. It may not be as lavish as the life of a merchant's wife, but it would be one filled with love."

He reached out and grabbed her hands, locking their fingers in an embrace beneath the soft cloth.

A gentle breeze blew through the forest. It felt as though time itself had stopped.

Yae and I held our breath as we watched Ayane and Jutaro stare into each other's eyes.

*...How much time has passed, exactly? Couple seconds, maybe?
Three? Four? Feels longer.*



Ayane's hands crept forward until they took the cloth from Jutaro. Then, she held it against her chest and spoke her answer.

"Yes... If you would accept someone like me... I want to be by your side...!" Ayane looked up at him with teary eyes.

"Ayane!"

The moment he heard her words, he reached out and embraced her tightly. How very bold of him.

"Jutaro-sama!"

Ayane hugged him tightly back, wiping her tears against his chest. The couple smiled and sniffled as they did nothing but hold each other for a while.

Heh... They're trapped in their own little world. However, there was a sudden interruption.

"Hmph! I am your sister, I am... Do you not feel a little embarrassed to be flaunting your affections so brazenly in front of me, do you not?"

"Ah, no... Yae, I just..."

"Y-Yae-sama?! I... I did not mean to put on a public display!"

The two of them were completely red in the face, and they backed off from each other a little.

C'mon, now. It was your brother's confession. It's not that big of a deal. What's with that reaction?

I shrugged and hoped that the couple would find further happiness.

"Congratulations are in order, they are. Ayane... Or should that be elder sister now, should it?"

"Fufu... Do not be hasty, though... We have not yet received the blessing of Jubei-sama or Nanae-sama."

Ayane smiled and wiped the happy tears from her eyes. I hadn't thought about that. Her being the daughter-in-law of Jubei would also make her my sister-in-law.

"Oh, you're right! I need to tell father and mother! Touya-dono, could you make us a **[Gate]** now?"

"Sure thing."

I grinned slightly and warped us off to the Kokonoe household.



The house was in an uproar due to the sudden news. When Jutaro told his parents about his engagement, Nanae responded by throwing her arms around Ayane and welcoming her to the family. Jubei, on the other hand, just told his son off for taking so long in getting around to confessing.

He might've been yelling, but anyone could see in his eyes that he was happy and proud. I was glad it went over well.

After that, Jubei called in his students from the dojo and started a round of drinking. Apparently some of the students had crushes on Ayane as well, but they'd been beaten to the punch by Jutaro in the end. Regardless, everyone started drinking sake and having a good time.

I participated in the feast by bringing some food and drinks from **[Storage]**, but I neglected to drink any alcohol.

"Yeah, I'll be back later. Yep. Thanks, everyone." Since I was having dinner in Eashen, I made sure to call Lu and tell her not to worry about cooking for me and Yae.

I'd stepped out into the garden of the Kokonoe household, which was separate enough from the dojo that the loud partying sounds were distant. I looked up at the full moon and enjoyed the breeze.

“Here you are, you are.”

“Oh, Yae. You aren’t with Jutaro?”

Yae walked out from the nearby corridor and came out to stand by me.

“He is still back at the dojo, he is. He is very happy right now. He laughed so much he nearly fell over.”

Frankly, I couldn’t blame him for letting loose. Jutaro was normally such a serious guy, and he definitely wasn’t a moron. He was just happy that things were going his way.

Apparently their marriage had been set for one or two years from now. They were waiting for my marriage to Yae, so my status as grand duke of Brunhild would have greater bearing on Jutaro’s social position. He’d be brother-in-law to a world leader, after all.

They didn’t seem to mind at all. Their feelings were in the right place, so they were as good as any husband and wife already.

“Ayane was clinging to the arm of my brother all night, she was. It is already as if they are married, it is.”

“They’re a good couple. I’m happy for them.”

“...If I must be honest, I am happy. However, I also feel a little bit lonely about it, I do. My brother will be building a new family with Ayane, he will. There is no room for me in that family, there is not. I know it is stupid... but part of me feels as if I have lost my brother, it does.”

Yae let out a little laugh. She clearly loved her brother very deeply. I didn’t have any brothers, but I could still see where she was coming from.

I moved closer to Yae and took her hand in mine.

“Even if your brother gets married, there’ll always be room for you. Family isn’t broken so easily, Yae. Even if his position changes slightly, he will always be your brother.”

“...You are right, you are... My brother can have his family, but I am his family as well, I am. My brother will always be my brother, and I will always be his sister, I will. Thank you, Touya-dono.”

Yae smiled beneath the pale moonlight. She looked beautiful. We stared at each other for a few magical moments and brought our faces closer together...

“Ooh! Grand Duke! I was looking for you!”

The two of us were startled by the sudden voice and jumped away from one another. It was Jutaro. He came running down the hallway toward the two of us.

Wow. His body is totally bruised... That’s... Yikes.

Yae, who was completely red in the face, turned to her brother with a pout.

“B-B-Brother! You must learn to read the atmosphere, you must!”

The accused party turned toward her and frowned.

“I do not know what you mean... Ahaha... Reading the atmosphere? Is that not more of a feminine concern? That sounds like something Ayane would say. Usually, you only care about the blade.”

“I-It is none of your business, it is not! What about you, hm?! You are so dull-headed that I wonder if Ayane even knows about your feelings, I wonder!”

“Huh?! What do you mean by that?!”

I looked at the bickering siblings and smiled.

Even though they were squabbling, I could feel the love they shared. After all, they got along closely enough to squabble like this.

I closed my eyes and heaved a satisfied sigh. I was blessed to have such wonderful people in my family.

Afterword

Hello again, I hope you've all enjoyed this volume of In Another World With My Smartphone.

It's sort of like a collection of shorter stories about forging bonds with new people. Touya's had his horizons broadened, literally, so he now has more opportunities to interact with even more people. And, of course, the opportunity for danger has increased as well.

Norn, the master of the black crown, made her debut in this volume. But of course, she has the same name as Norn from Brunhild's knight order.

To be honest, I originally chose Norn for the black crown contractor... but then I ended up using it prematurely.

In the webnovel version, the Norn from Brunhild was renamed Norue, but I just decided to keep her name the same for the light novel release.

I considered changing the crown contractor's name to something else during the publication, but I just couldn't bring myself to do it. In the end, that's her name. I don't want to take that from her. And that's also why the maid is still called Elfrau.

I had a feeling I would regret changing names on a dime.

Some of the heroines have similar names, too... Like Sue and Lu. I wonder why I did that... Then again, they're just nicknames. Sue is actually Sushie, and Lu is actually Lucia. I guess my shorthand names aren't very imaginative... Oh well, it's not really a big deal.

This volume was hard, since a lot of the writing was original content. You got three whole interludes that didn't exist in the web novel. There was a lot of different schedules involved, and so on...

Not to mention the fact that in Japan, the next volume comes with a Drama CD. It was my first time writing a script, so that was exciting. It was honestly a little hard to write something that was entirely dialogue...

Thankfully, we got the same voice actors they used in the anime, too. I wasn't able to attend the recording myself, but I heard it was a lot of fun.

I did receive a phone call from the guy organizing the recording on the day it happened... But I was sleeping like a log. Whoops! Why was my smartphone on silent? I don't remember setting it to that!

Since the Drama CD could only involve characters from the anime, Sakura, Lu, and Hilde weren't allowed.

...But if we get a second season, I'd like to write one for them. I think a Drama CD about a hero and all nine heroines could be a lot of fun.

Anyway, the Drama CD comes with the Japanese special edition of volume 16. I hope people enjoy it. The special edition even has a special cover illustration by Eiji Usatsuka. I love it.

Anyway, time to give my regularly scheduled thanks.

Thanks as ever, Eiji Usatsuka, for your amazing illustrations. I'm looking forward to seeing the special edition cover in stores, and the regular cover as well!

Thanks again to Tomofumi Ogasawara for the mecha designs. You've designed multiple crown Gollems at this point, and they're just so charming. Thanks again for working so hard.

As always, K, and the other members of Hobby Japan's editorial staff... Thank you so much!

And, of course, thanks to everyone who has continued to read my work so far, including those who are following the webnovel version.

Patora Fuyuhara

Bonus Short Story

The Crown-wielder Turned Adventurer

"I'd like to register as an adventurer."

"Hm?"

Misha, the catwoman receptionist of Brunhild's adventurer's guild, found her ears twitching towards the sudden voice from in front of the counter. Funnily enough, however... she couldn't see anyone. At least not until she peered down, and noticed a small girl standing there.

"I'd like to register as an adventurer!"

"Huh?"

The voice belonged to what seemed to be a five or six-year-old girl. She was standing next to a small knightly-looking creature that stood about the same height as her. It was a girl and a Gollem. The girl was named Norn, and her Gollem was the Crown, Chronos Noir.

"Uhm... H-How old are you?"

Strictly speaking, the guild had no formal restriction on the age you had to be to apply to join. Hypothetically even a baby could sign up if they paid the fee. But as a general unspoken rule, most receptionists barred entry for anyone who looked under twelve. Misha herself clearly saw this child as entering potential danger, and was trying to ward her off.

"I'll have you know I'm fifteen years old."

"...Are you?"

The girl folded her arms and began to grumble. Misha wasn't quite convinced by her words. Meanwhile, a bearded patron of the guild stumbled over with a grin on his face.

"Gahaha! Why don't you go home to mommy and help with her chores? Leave adventuring to people who can handle it, kiddo."

In a flash, the little service bell atop the counter was swiped by the girl and launched into the man's face. He didn't take that especially well.

"Y-You little... What the hell was that?!"

"I could ask the same of you, asshole!"

"Shut it! Don't go takin' us adventurers lightly!"

"Gah..."

A couple angry-looking guys stumbled up from their chairs. They seemed to be companions of the man who'd been struck in the face. Among adventurers, there were those eager to prove themselves, and some of them would even go so far as to challenge children.

"You little shit! Get outta here!"

One of the men violently lumbered over to Norn, intent on grabbing her.

"Ghh... Noir, suppress these morons!"

"...Affirmative."

The Black Golem let out an electronic-sounding sigh as Norn drew a magic gun from her waist. This weapon, known as a spellcaster, could launch bolts of lightning at enemies with the pull of a trigger. That's exactly what she did to the man chasing her. He fell to the ground, lightly toasted. Noir then ran towards the remaining ruffians and punched each of them in the belly, knocking them to the ground easily.

“Wh-What the heck...? You’re a crazy powerful kid...”

Misha looked on in confusion. The men that had just been so easily dispatched by this child were all blue-ranked adventurers: they were pretty experienced.

“Hm... You flatter me.”

Norn grinned, holstering her spellcaster before patting her hands together.

“My, my... What’s this?” A voice rang out.

“G-Guildmaster?”

Much to Misha’s surprise, Guildmaster Relisha had appeared in the room. The gorgeous elf was clearly curious about the little girl and her companion, given the way her eyes scanned the duo.

“Are you the boss here?” barked the small girl.

“That I am. What do you want?”

“I came to register as an adventurer. Can you help? I know the Grand Duke personally.”

Norn’s words caused Relisha to grin and raise an eyebrow. She turned to the receptionist.

“Misha, get her registered, would you?”

“E-Eh?! I-Is that okay to do...?”

“You saw how she and her little friend pushed around some blue-ranks, right? This is fine.”

Relisha grinned again, and Norn returned the expression with a fearless glare.

“Glad you’re reasonable. Now, what’s the best kind of job to get a lot of money, fast?”

“If it’s money you want, then you should delve into the dungeon islands we’ve set up. We’ll buy anything you find in there at a reasonable price.”

“Alright, then. After I finish registering, point me in the right direction.”

“N-No problem! Uhm... Here! Fill in this, and... This...”

Misha started showing Norn the forms to fill out, but there was a problem. Norn was from another world, and didn’t speak the common language of the world she was in. In the end, Misha had to fill it all out for her.

From the next day onwards, an absurd amount of raw materials started being brought into the adventurer’s guild on a daily basis.

Bonus Column

Merry Christmas & A Happy New Year

Merry Christmas!! Probably? It might well be Christmas when you're reading this, but I can't be sure. At the very least, in Japan, by the time this volume releases things should be kicking into the festive mood. Right now, at the time of writing, there isn't any snow or anything, though. Frankly I prefer the cold to the heat... So I'm waiting quite eagerly for Christmas.

Hm... Christmas, though... I used to work in a bakery, just as a part-timer. We always got busy around the holiday season. I obviously wasn't the one doing any of the baking, but it was still tough for me too! Christmas turned that little bakery into a warzone... Do you know how many pots I had to scrub? Over, and over again?

I also worked wholesale once, and toy sales just skyrocketed around Christmas, even as soon as November. We sent out crate after crate to stores all over the place, but the orders just kept coming in... Another fierce battle, I'll have you know.

I always worked part-time jobs around the holidays, and my actual Christmases always ended up being a bit understated and lonely... I'm a stay-at-home kinda guy. Sendai has this yearly event called the Pageant of Starlight. On December 12th, they light up the whole city in beautiful sparkling lights. I've never actually been to the switch-on event... I always just sit at home watching it on TV, remarking about how pretty it is. Unfortunately, much like the Tanabata Festival, I'm too much of a shut-in to go out to events like that...

Time goes by fast, though... There's only about a week between the end of Christmas, and the beginning of New Years. At the beginning of this year I had my fortune read, and the reading said I'd have great luck. Looking back on everything that happened, I'd say that was pretty accurate. Well... There was that time I got hospitalized, which wasn't so good... There was also this other incident where I came down with a serious sickness and my friend had to take me to the emergency clinic. Turns out I had the influenza virus, which I was not vaccinated against. Oops.

I'm not exactly a superstitious man, I don't put a lot of stock into having my fortune read, but I do see patterns sometimes... I suppose that's how they're made, though. Either way, I do enjoy it... I remember on that day I also bought a keychain at the shrine, and told myself that I'd start collecting keychains... But it didn't take me long to give up,ahaha...

That first shrine visit of the year was still fun, though. I'd like to go again next year. I'd offer up a prayer to God, but maybe he'll just reprimand me for not sticking to my resolutions.

Regardless, if it's the season where you are... Merry Christmas & A Happy New Year! Let's keep on enjoying In Another World With My Smartphone far into the future!



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In Another World With My Smartphone: Volume 15

by Patora Fuyuhara

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